Georgians and Abkhazians: the search for a peace settlement

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Preface

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The editors

Bruno Coppieters, Ghia Nodia and Yuri Anchabadze

August 1998

Bruno Coppieters/Ghia Nodia/Yuri Anchabadze

Georgians and Abkhazians

The Search for a Peace Settlement

Sonderveröffentlichung des BIOst 1998

Bruno Coppieters

Introduction

An analysis of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-93 and an assessment of the possibilities for a peace settlement has to combine a number of characteristics which do not easily fit together. It should not only present a factual account of the historic origins of the conflict but also help readers gain more insight into how Georgian and Abkhaz intellectuals describe it. The analysis should generate more understanding of these particular interpretations among readers, and should not be concerned primarily with refuting them. In both post-war communities, however, reconstructions of the past are largely based on a criticism of the interpretation made by "the opposite side". The analysis should therefore inform the reader about this inward view of the conflict to be found among Georgians and Abkhazians, including prejudices and mutual accusations. The present volume has been prepared in the conviction that a contribution to such an analysis can be made through a dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz scholars.

First drafts of the papers collected in this volume were discussed at a conference, held in Brussels at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel on 12-14 June 1997, which was co-organized by Ghia Nodia, Yuri Anchabadze and myself. The authors have striven for an academic presentation of their views on Georgian-Abkhaz history, aiming at a personal interpretation of the reasons why fear and distrust turned into hatred and an unrestrained use of force. Their reflection on the war is largely the result of a discussion on a broader scale. They present the views prevalent among Georgian and Abkhaz public opinion on, for instance, past injustices during czarist and Soviet times, their respective national projects and the transformation of these projects as a result of the war.

The attempt to present a balanced account of the Georgian and Abkhaz perspectives does not mean that normative concepts or polemical arguments had to be avoided. Viacheslav Chirikba uses the term "aggressive integrationalism" to describe the attempt by central governments to oppose, at whatever cost – including by violent means – the right to self-determination of a minority on their territory. This phrase – even if this is not stated explicitly by the author – mirrors the term "aggressive separatism" which has been repeatedly used by Eduard Shevardnadze to describe the attempts by nationalist movements to secede from established states at any cost and without any democratic legitimization or any possible justification by international legal standards. But even when being critical, or even polemical, the authors produce an argumentation that remains open to a productive discussion. Readers will notice that the participants in this book project do not put much effort into refuting their adversaries, but concentrate rather on giving a detailed explanation of their own points of view. Readers should bear in mind that before 1997

such exchanges of views in public academic fora took place only rarely. Though sometimes the authors do not hide their disappointment that the political perspective of their own public has not been properly understood by the other side, this attitude should be regarded as positive: it means that neither side is ruling out common ground in a rational exchange of arguments. Not all intellectual links between Georgians and Abkhaz have been broken off since the war.

The objective of this academic dialogue was to present a multifaceted analysis of the war, its origins and the prospects for ending it with a settlement. The conference and book project also had practical objectives. Encounters between academics have different aims from meetings between political representatives or NGOs. Here, the dialogue was not intended to duplicate on an academic level the negotiations taking place in Moscow or Geneva, or to come up with a mutually acceptable compromise for a settlement to the conflict. Nor was it to discuss how common projects could satisfy needs that are common to both communities – the objective of NGO co-operation projects. The specific academic objectives of this book project could be subsumed under two headings: first, to promote academic co-operation between the two communities in an international framework; second, to stimulate discussion among public opinion by producing a publication intended for a wide audience in Georgia and Abkhazia. These two objectives of the organizers are quite traditional in scientific activities. As the first objective, shared by the Georgian and Abkhaz participants, implies an internationalization of their co-operation through the involvement of foreign universities and research centres, it has, however, a political dimension which is not to be found in all scientific research projects. It parallels the efforts by the Abkhaz and Georgian governments to find recognition in the international community for their own proposals for a settlement, but it differs from these efforts in being confined to an exchange of views.

Co-Operation

The first objective of the conference project was co-operation. In the view of the organizers at the time of its initiation in summer 1996, a conference to discuss the first drafts for a book project and the ensuing publication had to demonstrate that practical co-operation between Georgian and Abkhaz academics was able, on a scientific level, to overcome the deadlock in the political negotiations between their governments. The conference in Brussels was not the first one in which Georgians and Abkhaz had met. There have been several conferences with the explicit aim of facilitating a dialogue between the conflicting sides. Initiatives have been taken by organizations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and the George Mason University, and by individuals such as Paula Garb from the University of California. NGO representatives had met in Moscow in March 1996 and in Schlainingen (Austria). In 1997, the OSCE invited Georgian and Abkhazian journalists to Warsaw. In early June 1997, a conference was organized in Haarlem by Mehmet Tütüncü, with the participation of Georgian and Abkhazian scholars.[1] The London-based NGO International Alert started with a confidence-building pro-gramme consisting of a series of six workshops, after a successful one in 1997.[2]

The Georgian and Abkhaz governments, faced with a deadlock in the discussion on their relations and with a mutual dependence on Russia which became to a certain extent a liability for

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1 Mehmet Tütüncü, *Caucasus: War and Peace. The New World Disorder and Caucasia*, Haarlem, 1998 (the book can be ordered by email <sota@euronet.nl>.

2 See the report by Anna Matveeva in: Coordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe, no. 5, Spring 1997, http://www.c-r.org/cr/ccts/.

both sides, had come to understand that it would be to the advantage of both of them to develop direct political contacts, aside from the negotiations organized in Moscow by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or those held under the auspices of the UN in Geneva. Such direct contacts did not lead to any breakthrough, but both sides continued to consider them useful and they have been supplemented in recent years by meetings between representatives of both communities at a more functional level. Officials from the security services and technical experts have met regularly in the last few years to tackle problems of common concern. In November 1997, the creation of a Co-ordination Council institutionalized direct encounters. The UN, which was most active in setting this up, hoped that such an attempt at rapprochement would facilitate a political settlement.

Encounters and co-operation projects between academics proceed from a similar perspective. Even before the war, relations between the two national scientific communities were deeply conflictual. Of all the social science disciplines, history and linguistics were the most prominent in ideological controversies. Historians and linguists engaged in scientific disputes on the origins of the Abkhaz language and on the presence of the two nationalities in the region in previous centuries. Their arguments lent support to nationalist politicians on both sides. Meanwhile, conflicts between scientific communities were also taking place on an institutional level. The creation of a branch of Tbilisi University in Sukhum(i) in 1989 was seen as provocation and resented by the Abkhaz community.[3] National identity and national sovereignty were the main issues in the war of 1992-93. The destruction of the Abkhaz historical archives in Sukhum(i) by Georgian troops was aimed at destroying the Abkhaz national memory. When the war came, all remaining contact between the two scientific communities was completely broken off, and this situation remained unchanged until initial contacts between the two communities could be made at a functional level.

Historians, philosophers and social scientists have no less professional interest in co-operating than engineers or other technical experts. Their involvement in ideological disputes does not hinder collaboration – on the contrary, it makes such co-operation even more urgent. For social scientists, engaging in ideological controversies is a normal part of their intellectual creativity. The quality of their research may be impaired only if they become blind to the possible consequences of their ideological involvement. But the latter will not interfere with the scientific nature of their research as long as basic methodological rules are respected, research results can be verified by colleages and the researchers themselves remain open to the criticism of their peers. The ideological component of scientific activity will have a negative effect on the quality of the research only if one of those conditions is not met. The critique by colleagues who do not share the same ideological presuppositions is an important element in this respect. The absence of scientific criticism which did not depart from Marxist-Leninist presuppositions, for instance, led to a dogmatization of social sciences in the Soviet Union. Scientific disputes between social scientists with different ideological affinities, or who defend opposing national interests, may stimulate fruitful reflection on the new societies which have emerged with the ending of the Soviet Union.

Georgian and Abkhaz social scientists have been quite active since the war in producing scientific articles, books and leaflets analysing the origins of the conflict. These books were intended for a domestic and, to a lesser degree, an international audience. There has, however, been no opportunity for social scientists from Georgia and Abkhazia to develop their argumentation or to discuss their research results within a common framework. During the discussion of the first drafts and the preparation of the second drafts, it was interesting to see that all the authors were

[3] See Naira Gelaschwili, *Georgien. Ein Paradies in Trümmern*, Berlin, Aufbau Verlag, 1993.

open to comments from all the other participants and have modified the contents of their second drafts accordingly, without, however, compromising on ideological issues which they regard as important. The factual accuracy of their descriptions, in particular, has benefited from this exchange of views.

This book primarily serves academic interests. Yet the preparation of such a book project also involves political interests, which need clarification. The relationship between academic and political motivation may, in this particular instance, seem an ambiguous one. There are various reasons to suppose that the political dimension of such academic co-operation would predominate. First, this collaboration between Abkhaz and Georgian academics took place in a situation where every form of contact between the two communities necessarily had a strong political colouring. Second, the subject of this scientific collaboration was history and politics. Third, several authors had been, or still were, actively involved in politics. Stanislav Lakoba, for instance, was the vice-chairman of the previous parliament of Abkhazia, Viacheslav Chirikba is the official representative of Abkhazia in Western Europe and Revaz Gachechiladze is current Georgian Ambassador to Israel. Fourth, the conference was funded by a TACIS contract with the European Commission, which is actively pursuing its own interests in the Caucasus region and regards such a conference as a contribution to a political settlement of the conflict. Fifth, the Georgian and Abkhaz governments tend to see a conference like this as one means, amongst others, of attracting international attention to their conflict and enlisting support for their positions among an international audience. They may also expect political benefits from such a conference, by obtaining better information about the variety of positions defended in the other community than is usually possible during direct political negotiations.

All these factors, which could have led to a "politicization" of the discussion to the detriment of its scientific character, were taken into account in the preparation of this project. In order to avoid negative interference in the book project by particular political interests, the editors were convinced that it was sufficient to follow quite traditional academic practices in organizing the discussions at the conference. They did not think that they needed to do more than require the authors to respect the usual scientific standards when preparing the book for publication. These requirements were intended to prevent too much interference by political interests in scientific debates, but were not meant to exclude ideological commitments or prevent value judgements. Scholars should not be considered less committed than other citizens to the political conflict in which their own community is engaged. Distrust and hatred are essential factors in a conflict where those involved failed to avoid the use of military force. The presentation of this dimension of the conflict was expected to proceed according to a rational line of argument, which would be conscious of all the difficulties in reaching a "balanced", "unbiased" approach to past injustices, to the horrors of the war and to the responsibilities of political leaders and the international community.

The conference was closed to the public, but some academic experts from Western universities and research centres were invited to prepare comments on the first drafts. In order to avoid a "politicization" of the debates, in such cases some specialists in confidence-building programmes advise inviting not academic regional experts but rather experts in specific disciplines (federalism, conflict resolution etc.) who are able to take a more abstract view of the conflict. Regional specialists, indeed, tend to be biased and to share the prejudices of one of the communities involved in the conflict, whereas theoretically-minded and regionally-uninformed specialists can help to relativize the ideological issues at stake. As conference organizers, we did not stick to this rule but considered that the standard academic procedures described above were sufficient to safeguard the primarily scientific character of any such project. We invited about

twenty researchers from various Western universities and research centres,[4] who in many cases happened to have better contacts with one side than the other. The fact that they were well informed about the issues under discussion, and were sometimes to be seen defending the arguments of one party to the dispute against the arguments of the other party, was not a handicap in debating an issue as complex as the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, but rather an advantage. The multiplicity of perspectives allowed for a fruitful exchange of information, which would probably not have taken place if the Georgian and Abkhaz scholars had had a monopoly on concrete historic information about the conflict, and the Western participants had been forced to stick to more abstract considerations.

The complex link between academic and political interests should not only be seen from the perspective that science may become dependent on political interests. Political organizations dealing with security issues are quite eager to make use of the activities of academic institutions and other NGOs, as they present a number of advantages over traditional forms of multilateral or bilateral diplomacy. First, for a number of international organizations it is not possible to establish direct relations with the governments of "suspended states" such as Abkhazia. With the exception of regular meetings with the UN and Russia (which are mediating between the two sides in the armed conflict), and sporadic discussions of an exploratory nature between the Abkhaz government and Western diplomats or representatives of international institutions, Abkhazia remains an outcast from international diplomatic fora. The funding of co-operation activities with non-governmental organizations from Abkhazia is one possible way of avoiding, to some extent, the negative consequences of this exclusion. This does, however, involve the risk that political discussions with suspended states on ethnic and regional conflicts may become dependent on spontaneous initiatives taken (in their own interest) by academic institutions or other NGOs which are capable of attracting sufficient attention and financial support from funding organizations.

From the perspective of political organizations dealing with security issues, there is a second advantage to academic or other types of co-operation at the level of NGOs: such forms of collaboration are based on their own time-scales – proceeding at a different pace from political negotiations – and are far less sensitive to ups and downs in the political situation. A dialogue between scholars can make progress according to their own criteria, regardless of setbacks in governmental negotiations. In the second half of 1996, for instance, a breakdown in the political negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia – due to the preparation of parliamentary elections by the Abkhaz government without the participation of the Georgian IDPs – was only narrowly avoided. Yet these tensions between the two governments did not threaten the ongoing preparations for this conference, including the support of the Georgian and Abkhaz authorities.

Most NGOs working on Georgian-Abkhaz issues are funded by Western organizations. It is remarkable, in this respect, that the Russian authorities, which have considerable interests at stake and a strong military involvement in the Caucasus region, have up to now not sufficiently realized the opportunities that can be offered by confidence-building programmes or by scientific

[4] The conference was attended by Anthony Antoine (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Lincoln Allison (University of Warwick), Martina Bohm (La Trobe University, Melbourne), Kevin Clements (George Mason University), Rachel Clogg (University of Oxford), Jonathan Cohen (Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations, The Hague), Jan de Voogd (TACIS Monitoring & Evaluation Office, Tbilisi), Theodore Hanf (Arnold Bergsträsser Institute, Freiburg), Heidi Hiltunen (European Commission), Terrence Hopmann (Brown University), Kahka Gogoloshvili (Georgian Embassy), Ria Laenen (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Anna Matveeva (International Alert, London), Nino Nanava (London School of Economics), Klaus Rasmussen (University of Copenhagen), Eric Remacle (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Andrea Schmidt (Université Catholique de Louvain), David Tirr (European Commission) and Martin Schuemer (UN Volunteers).

collaboration between academics in regions in conflict,[5] including even the opportunity to allow a better understanding of Russian policies which – as one can read in the Georgian and Abkhaz contributions – are in need of legitimacy and acceptance.

Public Opinion

The production of a book was the main practical objective of the conference. In the case of Georgia and Abkhazia, such an activity takes on a particular connotation. Active involvement by public opinion in the discussion on the terms for a fair settlement of the conflict may be seen by some political representatives or by officials from international organizations as superfluous, or even as a threat to steady progress in the negotiations, but in the end it is an indispensable condition of any political solution in the Caucasus. The mobilization of public opinion in the conflicts in the region has been too thorough and the struggle for power in all Caucasian countries is too bitter to allow any compromise solution in conditions where public opinion is not prepared to follow suit. The Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrosian, learned through experience that a willingness to compromise can easily been interpreted by political adversaries as a selling-out of state interests.

The Georgian and Abkhaz leaderships are constantly on their guard against a negative reaction from their public to initiatives they are taking. The confrontational policies that the Georgian and Abkhaz governments have pursued – even after 1993, when they agreed to a cease-fire and the principle of peaceful negotiations – were framed largely on the basis of domestic political needs. Such uncompromising policies aimed to counter the anger of large parts of the population dissatisfied with the lack of concrete positive results achieved through negotiation, and their anxiety that their interests would be neglected. Both governments" fear of losing the confidence of their own rank and file may partly explain why discussions on the political status of the Abkhazian state and on a peace agreement did not make significant progress. In these conditions, it makes sense to strive for direct involvement by public opinion in the ongoing discussions between the two sides. The production of a book for both a Georgian and an Abkhaz audience may be a contribution to the dialogue between these communities – one that is not confined to political representatives, and that may be helpful in fostering more understanding in public opinion on each side of the aspirations and aims of the main political players in the other.

The concept of public opinion is used by several authors in this book. Revaz Gachechiladze equates the opinion of "the Abkhaz" or "the Georgians" with "the prevailing public opinion in the two ethnic groups". A similar use of the term "the Abkhazians" or "the Georgians" can be found in the contributions of Yuri Anchabadze or Ghia Nodia. The preference of all the authors for the concept of public opinion rather than the term "civil society", which is far more popular in academic circles, is interesting in itself. The concept of "public opinion" denotes a relatively less active form of involvement in public affairs than that implied in the concept of "civil society". The use of this term (or the use of the term "the Abkhazians" or "the Georgians" as defined by Revaz Gachechiladze) avoids difficult debates on the question as to how far there is an active (a "real") civil society in Georgia or Abkhazia. Many may doubt the significance of "civil society" in both communities, but few would question the importance of public opinion in their struggles for sovereignty and independence.

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[5] In an article for *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, Alexander Iskandarian has expressed his bitterness at this lack of interest: 'Uchenye obsuzhdayut problemy Kavkaza', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 November 1997.

The idea for this book project was based on the observation that the search for a negotiated solution remains the very highest priority in Abkhazia and Georgia, but that the discussions on political perspectives are not taking place within a suitable framework. The discussion on alternatives to economic embargoes, to the refusal to undo ethnic cleansing or to permanent military mobilization are, in general, being held within rather than between the communities. Each side lacks information concerning the debates on political strategy taking place on the other side. What are people's views on a common state? How will the local population of Abkhazia react to the return of refugees? How does public opinion in Georgia and Abkhazia perceive the future of the Caucasus region? What is the link between national identities and regional identities? What do people feel about the creation of common Caucasian institutions? Generally, those who are shaping the discussion in public opinion themselves lack information about the intellectual perspectives to be found at the other side of the cease-fire line. This book project aims at filling that gap. The creation of a "common state", on which the Georgian and Abkhaz governments seem to agree in very general terms, is also in need of a "common public opinion" in order to define its precise institutional content.

The authors were not writing exclusively for their own "home" public or for the anonymous readership of international scientific journals. One of the aims striven for during the preparation of this book was that the authors would bear in mind the sensitivity of the public on "the other side". The discussion of first drafts at the conference in Brussels appeared fruitful in that respect. This may explain why the polemical style, so characteristic in writing aimed at a domestic audience, was avoided. When Georgians read the contribution from Stanislav Lakoba, for instance, they will be confronted with the proposal for a Confederation to be constituted initially by Georgia, Abkhazia and Chechnya, and which would remain open for other Caucasian nations to join. In this article, the author gives a sharp critique of Georgian policies during the brief period of independence 1918-21, but he also takes into account what he perceives as the common geopolitical interests and civilizational traditions of Georgia, Chechnya and Abkhazia. He explains his preference for a confederal solution – in which all participant states would safeguard their sovereignty and would deal with one other on equal terms – by the lack of trust in federal institutions. According to his argumentation, federal institutions would inevitably lead to the oppression of the Abkhazian community. The main reason (and here the author is quoting from "Severnyi Kavkaz", a pan-Caucasian émigré journal published in Warsaw in 1934) is that "this has been the fate of all states in which small nations have united around large nations".

The reader may raise various objections or formulate further research questions concerning this proposal for a settlement of the conflict. The European experience has indeed shown that wider regional integration could have positive consequences for the federalization of previously unitary states in the European Union, such as Spain or Belgium, and for regionalization or devolution processes in non-federal countries such as Italy or the United Kingdom. The European Union itself has acquired a quasi-federal structure through limiting the sovereignty of its members, which may be interesting for regionalization processes in other areas. But is there something like a Caucasian identity which might be based on specific civilizational values like equality and independence, and which could underpin an integration process? Is integration possible without a severe limitation of the national sovereignty of states, implying the necessity to go beyond any confederal type of governance? Does the integration process in pan-European institutions or alliances with regional powers not offer a more attractive prospect to the North and South Caucasian nations – which may make all Caucasian integration processes extremely difficult? Would a confederation solve the problem of co-existence between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities in Abkhazia itself? What guarantees could a confederation offer for a peaceful resolution of conflicts between constituent members? Is it still true in the 1990s (as it was largely

true in the 1930s) that unequal strength of nationalities in a federal structure is never corrected by adequate institutions and inevitably leads to the oppression of the weaker nation? Are the Catalans, the Basques and the Galicians now oppressed minorities in Spain, as they were in the 1930s? Is the German-speaking Community an oppressed minority in Belgium (it constitutes a smaller percentage of the total Belgian population (0.7%) than the Abkhaz constituted in Georgia in 1989)? Last but not least: what guarantees would such an option of a Caucasian Confederation offer for vital Russian security interests at its southern borders? Would political frameworks other than a confederation (integrative structures similar to the Nordic Council, for instance, in which both national and regional governments are represented)[6] not be better suited to integrating the various interests of the regions and states of the Caucasus, including Russia? Some of these issues were discussed during the June conference and some contributions to this volume give partial answers. Here, suffice it to say that the ideas of Stanislav Lakoba go beyond a defence of Abkhaz interests, and that he bases his proposal on his personal perception of common Caucasian interests.

The same concern for common interests can be found in the contribution from Revaz Gachechiladze. He does not refrain from making accusations against the Abkhaz leadership regarding past policies and their responsibility for the lack of progress in the political negotiations, but at the same time he builds the entire structure of his chapter on the thesis that the international economy only needs the goods and services that Abkhazia used to produce in Soviet times on condition that a political agreement between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides secures stability and an adequate work-force. Normal contacts with the outside world would be a prerequisite for any economic development, which could take place only after a mutually agreed political settlement. Someone defending Abkhazia's right of secession could oppose this argument with the thesis that the need for small national minorities to be integrated into a larger economic market and to be protected by strong state power may have been true in the past, but that the globalization of the world economy and the strengthening of international law has now significantly lowered the costs of independence.[7] The number of independent countries has risen from 62 before World War I to 193 today. Of these, 35 have less than half a million people, whereas the pre-war population of Abkhazia was 537,000.[8] Independence might render Abkhazia's access to international markets and its participation in international fora more difficult than if it were a federated state, but economic reasons would not make independence impossible. It could be asked whether Revaz Gachechiladze's arguments would be convincing to proponents of Abkhazian independence, who generally regard national freedom as far more important than the material welfare of their own population. This does not, however, challenge Revaz Gachechiladze's main thesis, which is that a political agreement is a precondition for the economic reconstruction of Abkhazia. Abkhazia will have more difficulty in joining St Vincent, Iceland, Luxemburg, Tonga, Tuvalu and Nauru in the club of micro-states – as it requires the blessing of the international community and the agreement of the Georgian government – than in joining the club of European regions, together with Ajaria – which has been a member of the Assembly of the Regions of Europe (ARE) since 1987 – and other federated states to be created in Georgia. In this case too, the academic debate on the future shape of Abkhazian statehood will eventually have to hinge on the common interests shared between Georgia and Abkhazia.

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6 See Johan Galtung, 'Some observations on the Caucasus', in: *Caucasian Regional Studies*, vol. 2, Issue 1, http://www.vub.ac.be/POLI/.

7 cf. Will Kymlicka, 'Is Federalism a Viable Alternative to Secession?', in: Percy B. Lehning, *Theories of Secession*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp. 140-141.

8 'Small but Perfectly Formed', *The Economist*, 3 January 1998.

The dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz academics should not be considered an intellectual form of negotiation between representatives of the two nationalities. None of the participants has received any political mandate to negotiate, and their contributions express individual views. Evidence for these personal perceptions can be found in the different approaches to the conflict taken by the Georgian and Abkhaz authors. First of all, the reader will find different methodological approaches presented in this book. Ghia Nodia, for instance – trained as a political philosopher – focuses his attention on how both communities have conceived their respective national projects through changing historical circumstances and how these projects collided in their struggle for emancipation. Both communities defined themselves as nations on an ethnic basis and strove for full sovereignty at the expense of other ethnic groups. This explanation of the conflict emphasizes the importance of the subjective grasp of reality by social collectives. Revaz Gachechiladze, as a social geographer, is far more interested in analysing the common material interests of the communities which may bring them to a compromise.

Secondly, the reader will find differences between the political projects and their proposed solutions to the conflict. The Georgian participants do not necessarily all share the same views of the steps to be followed in resolving the conflict. The same may be said of the Abkhaz contributions. To take the latter as an example: as indicated above, Stanislav Lakoba regards the creation of a confederal triangle consisting of Georgia, Abkhazia and Chechnya as the starting-point for a reconciliation between Georgia and Abkhazia, whereas Viacheslav Chirikba examines a federative formula, based on the principle of internal self-determination, in which Abkhazia, Georgia, Ajaria and South Ossetia would enjoy full sovereignty on their territory but – retaining strong veto rights – would delegate functions such as border control, customs and foreign policy to common bodies. He is far more optimistic than Stanislav Lakoba about the possibility of learning lessons – from the present world experience of devolution and shared sovereignty – for putting into practice the principles of equality and self-determination for smaller nations within bigger states. He remains, however, quite careful not to go beyond the statement that "shared sovereignty" may be considered an option. The delegation of a number of functions to common bodies, while retaining strong veto rights, does not go beyond a loose confederal arrangement, where sovereignty is not shared but all powers remain under the control of the founding states.

Thirdly, the reader may also notice the approach taken by the individual authors to the question of political responsibility for the escalation of the conflict into open war. It is not the aim of this introduction to go into a detailed comparison of the positions held, but merely to explain the background to this book project and to point out some issues which may be of particular importance to the reader. But it is possible to demonstrate that the different ethical positions taken by the authors do not simply reflect their allegiance to particular official political objectives. They are based on different views of political ethics and of the moral value of concepts such as "nation" and "citizen", which transcend such communal differences.

These individually different approaches and proposals do not reflect a contradiction between moderate and radical positions. All the proposals are, indeed, to be considered as a positive intellectual contribution to political negotiations, even if, in their present form, they are unlikely to be acceptable to the other side. Each proposal expresses the same degree of loyalty to one community. The differences in the proposals indicate that there is a good deal of room in both Georgia and Abkhazia for independent political thought.

Opposing approaches to the conflict are also to be found in public opinion in Georgia and Abkhazia, as could be seen from the mixed reactions to the meeting of presidents Shevardnadze and Ardzinba in Tbilisi in August 1997. Public opinion in both states was divided over the issue of whether this meeting – taking place on the anniversary of the outbreak of war in 1992 – should

or should not be regarded as a positive step towards a resolution of the conflict. The choice of this date was regarded by many Abkhaz (not without reason) as a tactless move, imposed by the Russian facilitator of the meeting without considering its symbolic significance for the civilian population. Public opinion in Georgia seems far more divided than in Abkhazia in its attitude to the negotiations. This is due first of all to the political and social marginalization of the IDPs (internally displaced persons) from Abkhazia in Georgian society. The civilian population that remained in Abkhazia is hurt in a relatively even-handed way by the ongoing economic isolation of the region while, on the contrary, there is a sharp differentiation between the long-term interests of the Georgian IDPs and those of the rest of the Georgian population. Secondly, the refusal by the Abkhaz leadership to have any dialogue with the political representatives of the Georgian population from Abkhazia has led to a radicalization of the latter's position. Some are advocating the use of force to make the return of refugees possible, drawing an analogy between their situation and that of the PLO before it could start negotiations with the Israeli government. It remains to be seen what consequences such differentiated public attitudes and opinions will have on the negotiations. Much will depend on how the public perceives new institutional compromises. The majority of Georgians will not accept a compromise that could lead to the secession of Abkhazia, while Georgian IDPs and the other communities in Abkhazia expect far more than that. They want strong security guarantees, and may refuse any institutional compromise that they consider to be inadequate for preventing a new war sooner or later. From this perspective, the negotiations which have been going on in recent years give few grounds for optimism. Neither side has been able to propose a formula that takes into account the security needs of the other. A radical change in the attitude of both sides – as analysed in the contribution by Theo Jans – would be the first condition of success.

Ghia Nodia

The Conflict in Abkhazia: National Projects and Political Circumstances

There are many different ways in which to contextualize – and explain – a conflict like the one in Abkhazia. In some cases pre-existent ("ancient") ethnic hatred, previously kept in check by an outside power but liberated by democratization, is seen as the cause of all the trouble; others see the conflict as a minority's reaction to an assault by a majority's nationalism; while instrumentalists prefer to look for elites who manipulate ethnic sentiments in their particular ("group") interests: once these interests have been exposed, the puzzle of the conflict may be considered solved. Still others tend to reduce the problem to a conspiracy by an outside imperial power which decided to play the *divide et impera* card once again. I believe that all the above factors were valid (to different degrees, of course), but that they could do no more than encourage a conflict which had its root causes elsewhere.

In my view, the conflict in Abkhazia is a conflict of political modernization. In the modern era, ethnic groups find themselves in a world where the political map is increasingly defined by nation-states rather than multi-ethnic empires, and where political power is legitimized by the will of peoples/nations rather than divine right of monarchs. In this new world, ethnic groups feel that they *have* to define their own political status as well. Empires may acquire the policies of "official nationalism", that is, they may try to assimilate minority populations into their language and culture (the Russification policy of the late 19th century is regarded as a classic example of this).[1] Smaller groups that do not yet have separate political identities by the time the tide of political modernization reaches them find themselves in the situation described by some scholars as an "assimilation dilemma":[2] either they have to acquire the national and political identity of a politically dominant – and usually more "advanced", that is, modernized – nation, which has already developed a statehood of its own, agree to reduce their native vernaculars to the status of "kitchen languages" and recognize the superiority of the ways of the powerful and "advanced" nation over their own traditional mores; or they have to acquire a distinct cultural and political personality and create ("invent", "imagine" – as modern students of nationalism like to say) their own programme for achieving proper political status which will represent and maintain this distinctness.

The problem is that history does not provide ready-made material for modern nations-to-be: different ethnic groups create a patchwork of languages, cultures and political traditions, which have to be reshaped to fit into the hard and fast lines of nation-states. Newly emerged nationalist elites take on this job of "reshaping" the pre-existent ethnic material so that it fits into the more rigid model of modern nationhood. I will call the basic pattern, on which the work of reshaping or reconstructing is based, a *national project*. A national project is an ideal construct which usually holds answers to at least several major questions: 1. "Who are we?", that is, how do we define the people comprising our national "we"? 2. What is "our land" – how can we demarcate the territory that is our national home? 3. What political status would be appropriate for our group (are we eligible for fully independent statehood or is something more "modest" acceptable)? 4. What are we *not* – in contrast to whom do we define our identity (remembering the assimilation dilemma, this question can be reformulated thus: "who would we become if we chose to be assimilated")?

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1 Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nationalism and Communism*, Methuen: London, 1964, pp. 19-24.

2 Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1985, p. 12; Karl W. Deutsch, *Problems of Nation-Building and National Development,* in: Karl W. Deutsch, William J. Foltz (eds.), *Nation-Building*, Atherton Press: New York, 1963, p. 140.

5. Who is our *primary enemy*? (this may or may not coincide with the group or state representing the threat of assimilation) – and who are our other enemies (usually seen as conspiratorial allies or puppets of the primary enemy)? 6. Who are our friends and relatives – who are our "natural" or provisional allies? 7. What is our *civilizational orientation* – what civilization are we part of (such as "Western", "Middle Eastern", "Latin", etc.)? 8. What kind of political and economic order do we want to have? (the late 20th century seems to provide few alternatives to "market democracy" – though in reality there is a choice, and it may be contingent on the answer to the previous question: for instance, nowadays a Western orientation provides stronger motivation for adopting a democratic system than do other cultural affiliations).

In an ideal world of utopian nationalism, every nation would have its own national project and national statehood in accordance with a certain idea of historical fairness; together, they would constitute a concert of humanity. In real life, however, the implementation of a national project may take place at the expense of one's neighbour: populations are mixed, the messages of history are vague, and there are no clear criteria for deciding who "deserves" what. Conflicts occur, grounded in clashes between different national projects.

The conflict in Abkhazia – or, to be more accurate, the conflict *about* Abkhazia – is a case of this generic type. I believe that, with the liberalization and further democratization of the Soviet Union, it was unavoidable. In saying this, however, I do not mean that the *war* in Abkhazia was unavoidable too. In order to understand the roots of the conflict, one has to describe and understand the national projects around which Georgian and Abkhaz nationhood, respectively, were constituted (or constructed – to use the more modern word); the particular political circumstances, however, will help us understand why the conflict *unfolded* the way it did.

Formation of the Georgian and Abkhaz National Projects

In describing national projects, I will have to refer back to some historical facts. Since history is often used by both parties in order to justify or denounce certain political claims, I want to make it clear at this point that I will only make my historical references in an attempt to *understand* why Georgians and Abkhaz developed the kinds of national projects they did, and why their visions came into conflict. In doing so, I will not question legitimacy of either group.

Modern Georgian nationalism began in the mid 19th century.[3] Ilya Chavchavadze, who can be regarded as its founding father, tried to base a new vision of Georgia on European models of liberal nationalism. He formulated his slogan as *Mamuli, Ena, Sartsmunoeba* – "Fatherland, Language, Faith". This shows both continuity and a break with the medieval Georgian tradition. In the Middle Ages, "Georgian-ness" was equated with being an Orthodox Christian. The eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartli adopted Christianity in the 4th century, and from the religious split of the 7th century, when Georgia became diophysitic (that is, shared Greek Orthodoxy, in contrast to monophysitic faith of the Armenian Church)[4] until the late 18th century, when Russia became involved in the Caucasus, the Georgians were the only Orthodox Christians surrounded by a predominantly Islamic population. Those ethnic Georgians who adopted some other religion – even if they continued to speak the Georgian tongue – were no longer considered Georgians by others: they were called either Tartars (if they switched to Islam), Armenians (if they were

[3] There was an episode of aristocratic nationalism which expressed itself in the anti-imperial conspiracy of 1832, but it did not develop further. In the 1860s, Ilya Chavchavadze had to start Georgian nationalism on a new basis, though tribute was paid to the conspirators of the previous generation.

[4] The dogmatic difference is in interpreting the nature of Christ: diophysites (i.e., Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox) recognize His dual (divine and human) nature, while monophytes (i.e., Armenian Gregorians) deny His human nature.

baptized in the Armenian church) or even *prangi*, "French" (if they adopted Roman Catholic faith). On the other hand, the church used Georgian, so language became an important marker as well, though in conjunction with religion. In the mid 10th century, the Georgian hagiographer Giorgi Merchule formulated what became the medieval paradigm of what "Georgia" meant: "Georgia consists of those spacious lands in which church services are celebrated and all prayers are said in the Georgian tongue".[5] Ilya Chavchavadze, by putting "Language" before "Faith", secularized Georgian nationalism, making it similar to other linguistic nationalisms of the 19th century, and opened it up to Muslim Georgians and Georgians of other denominations; in doing so, however, he could also appeal to the medieval tradition.

This way in which the modern Georgian national project reconstructed a medieval past will help us understand important aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In the words of Ernest Gellner,[6] Georgians defined their country as the realm of Georgian "high culture", that is, the area where Georgian was the language of literacy and an elite culture. This area also included Abkhazia. The root of the conflict lay in a discrepancy between the high culture of Abkhazia and popular Abkhaz ethnic culture (we must remember that Gellner warned strongly against interpreting the term "high" in terms of *value*: it merely implies attribution to the "higher" classes of society). Ethnic Abkhazians are not ethnically related to Georgians – linguistically they are kin to the North Caucasian peoples (Kabardins, Adighe, etc.). But the medieval Abkhaz kingdom was part of the Georgian cultural and political realm. The Abkhaz, unlike the Georgians, had no alphabet, so Georgian was the language of the Abkhaz aristocracy. Whenever Georgia, or Western Georgia, represented a unified political structure, Abkhazia was part of it. In some periods, the whole of Western Georgia was unified under the name of Abkhazia (Abkhazeti), at other times, approximately the same territory bore the name of Egrisi (which means "land of the Megrelians" – a sub-ethnic Georgian group). When Georgia disintegrated into smaller princedoms, these cultural ties between elites were preserved. This history has led Georgians to believe that Abkhazia is a legitimate part of Georgia, despite the fact that, ethnically speaking, the Abkhaz are not related to the Georgians.

However, this inference from the way the idea of Georgia was reconstructed in the 19th century became important only later, when Georgian nationalism reached the stage of a political movement. In the beginning of the nationalist movement in Georgia, the national ambitions were still pretty timid, being mostly confined to issues of culture, the preservation of the native language and the like, and the idea of even limited autonomy within the Russian empire was not seriously entertained until the 1905 revolution in Russia. Georgian nationalism was not fully politicized until Georgia was pushed into acquiring full independence by the break-up of the Russian empire and, later, the failure of the Transcaucasian Federation in 1918. This was when the paradigm of Georgian political nationalism was formulated. This paradigm was re-invoked, almost unchanged, by the national liberation movement of the *perestroika* period. After the experience of brief independence in 1918-21 (interrupted by the Russian Communist invasion), nothing short of full independence could satisfy Georgian political ambitions any more. In 1989-90, there was not a single political party or group in Georgia proper[7] that did not include in its charter a demand for independence. Russia naturally filled the slot for "the enemy" (independence meant independence from Russia) and it also embodied the threat of assimilation. This did not mean particular emotional hostility to this country, much less to Russians as an ethnic group, but that is a different story: where the plan for independence was concerned, the major impediments were expected from the North. Turkey had been a threat in the period 1918-21, and recollections of

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5 Revaz Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia: Space, Society, Politics,* Texas A & M University Press: College Station, 1995, pp. 19-20.

6 Ernest Gellner*, Nation and Nationalism*, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1983, pp. 50-52.

7 "Georgia proper" excludes Abkhazia and South Ossetia, future breakaway regions.

medieval Muslim invasions were still strong enough to encourage mistrust, but since Turkey was a rival force to Russia, this made her an ally for Georgia.

However, neither Turkey nor any other regional country is *the* ally: the major protector and patron is seen – however realistically or otherwise – as "the West" in general. This is an extrapolation of the paradigm of medieval times when Christian Georgia, which felt itself under siege from Muslim countries, looked for help to the "big" Christian world. Culturally, Georgians have difficulty in saying "we are a Western nation", though some would say that typologically, in their essence, Georgians are Westerners who went astray under the influence of their non-Western neighbours. The fact is, however, that, in terms of orientation, since the 19th century the Georgian elite has been looking for models in the West. Democracy is considered to be the model of political order – not because Georgians are such committed democrats, but because nowadays there is no other way to be Western. Many supporters of the nationalist Georgian president Gamsakhurdia said that in the event of a contradiction, independence should take precedence over democracy – but, arguably, even this attitude does not contradict the "Western way" in principle: the nation-state is a Western idea as well, and Western nation-states have not always been democratic from the outset.

Since independence from Russia is the primary task of Georgian nationalism (and given the presence of Russian troops and the degree of Russian leverage on Georgia, many believe it has yet to be accomplished), all other adversaries are viewed in the light of this opposition. Minorities who are not loyal to Georgia therefore have to be conceptualized as accomplices of Russia. This is not to suggest that the Russians did – or did not – support Abkhaz or Ossetian secessionism; it merely explains why it is that, from the Georgian perspective, any conflict with minorities only makes sense in relation to its struggle for independence from Russia. This has seriously damaged the Georgian ability to assess the situation because, although Russian support for separatist causes within the "union republics" was indeed logical, these attitudes have prevented Georgian elites from seeing the interests of the Abkhaz or Ossetes in their own right.

Two other features of Georgian nationalism which are relevant here are that it is non-assimilationist and non-imperialist. In relation to the first point, I will refer to a distinction frequently made between the French and German forms of nationalism. In the words of Roger Brubaker,[8] the former is assimilationist (and ultimately universalist), while the latter is differentialist. The French pursue the project of assimilating their minorities, which makes them willing to accept them as "French" in so far as they adopt French culture and agree to forget (or at least give secondary value to) their own particular heritage. Ataturk's idea of Turkish nationalism also follows this pattern. The concept of Russian nationalism was never clearly formulated, but its mainstream is inclined towards the assimilationist model as well. In these cases, culture and language take precedence over "blood", that is, common ancestry. For the German type of nationalism, however, it is *jus sanguinis* – that is, the principle of blood heritage – that matters most. Even in today's highly democratic country, this principle remains valid for the acquisition of citizenship, so that in recent decades culturally Germanized descendants of Turkish immigrants have had greater difficulty in acquiring citizenship than ethnic Germans from Russia or Kazakhstan who did not even speak the language but had documents to prove their ethnic ancestry. Following this classification, Georgians (like most other Caucasians, with the possible exception of the Azeris, who assimilate any Muslims easily) give preference to the exclusionist model. Though some representatives of minorities (especially Armenians and Ossetes) have been quite happy to assimilate and made their names sound more Georgian, most Georgians resist this

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8 "If the French understanding of nationhood has been state-oriented and assimilationist, the German understanding has been *Volk*-centered and differentialist". *Citizenship and Nationhood*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge/Mass., 1990, p. 184.

and have difficulty in perceiving ethnic converts as "real" ones. Since Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in 1992, there have been some deliberate efforts on the part of non-governmental groups and Shevardnadze's party (the Citizens' Union of Georgia) to reinforce the sense of common citizenship rather than ethnicity, but they have not been particularly successful and never reached the stage of endorsing assimilationism: this would be rejected by both ethnic Georgians and minority communities.

Likewise, Georgian nationalism has never had imperialist/expansionist ambitions. This is obviously not how it appears from the Abkhazian perspective: the Abkhaz see Georgia as an empire which wants to conquer "foreign countries" (such as Abkhazia). In an interview, the Russian democrat and Nobel prize-winner Andrei Sakharov once called Georgia "a small empire", and this line is quoted in most Abkhaz and Russian accounts of the conflict. Of course, if one calls any state with a multi-ethnic population an "empire", then Georgia may also be called one (although in this case there would be very few states that are not empires). But if an "empire" is defined as a state whose national project is based on the idea of conquest and expansion (which would make more sense to me, and would correspond to the traditional use of the word), then Georgia hardly fits into that category. The national project of modern Georgia is that of a classical nation-state – it is based on the idea that "we only want what belongs to us, but what does belong to us, we will never give up". Abkhazia is Georgia, because it has always been part of Georgia when it was united. Georgians cannot see Abkhazia as a "foreign" land which was once conquered by them, and the accusation of imperialism usually makes them furious. They have a very clear idea of what "our land" is, even though it is now carved up by the borders of Soviet Georgia. (Most people believe that some land that was "historically ours" is now in Turkey, as well as in Azerbaijan or Armenia, but even the most radical nationalists understand that bringing this up would be impractical – so it is better to allow the Soviet maps to define the image of "our land").

It is obvious to any serious scholar of nationalism that the definition of "our land" is politically contingent, and that there are no universally valid criteria here. But this is not the point: once the definition *is* formulated, nobody would consider claiming any territory which is not "historically ours". Georgians sometimes profess to playing a special role in the Caucasus, and the Iberian-Caucasian idea (based on the alleged kinship between Georgians and many North-Caucasian peoples, including the Abkhaz) was indeed popular in Gamsakhurdia's times and may be seen as kind of proto-imperialism. But even the craziest Georgian nationalist would be unlikely to contemplate annexing Chechnya or Daghestan. In general, in so far as nationalism is centred around the idea of a nation-state, it is hardly compatible with the idea of empire. There are also other kind of distinctions: nationalists are usually selfish and self-centred, while imperialists are altruistic and cosmopolitan, care for the world and try to improve it (although quite willing to impose happiness and progress by force). For good or ill, Georgians as a nation are not notable for the latter qualities.

As for the modern Abkhaz national project, its construction starts with the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.[9] But the initial ethnic and historical setting in which the Abkhaz elite had to carry out its task was different from the Georgian one. Although Abkhazia had a history of statehood to which it could appeal, this history did not come with a corresponding "high culture", that is cultural traditions based on specifically Abkhazian writings.

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[9] In this section of my paper, I depend partly on my notes from the lecture delivered by the Abkhaz-Georgian historian, Gia Anchabadze, during the conference organized by the Caucasian Home and Heinrich Böll Foundation in Tbilisi in September 1992. Of course, Dr. Anchabadze cannot be held responsible for my interpretation of his ideas. For understandable reasons, I feel less confident in my interpretation of the Abkhaz national project and would especially appreciate any criticisms or suggestions.

Another feature of Abkhaz nationalism was that the national project of the Abkhaz was less about political independence than about survival as a distinct ethnic group. This appeared to stem from particular historical circumstances. Circassian tribes put up strong resistance to Russian domination, and "appropriate" repercussions followed. In the 1870s, the majority of the ethnic Abkhaz population was forced to move to Turkey (in what is called *Mokhajirstvo*). Even so, they were luckier than peoples like the Shapsughs and Ubykhs, their neighbours to the north of the Caucasus range, who were either slaughtered or driven completely from their land (survivors from the slaughter also took refuge in Turkey). Being few in absolute numbers, not protected by traditions of literacy, and gradually becoming minority in their own land, the Abkhaz faced the obvious danger of sweeping assimilation. It could be said that the emotional cornerstone of the Abkhaz national project is to avoid a repetition of the fate of the Shapsughs and Ubykhs.

Following the above-mentioned duality of the cultural and political tradition, the Abkhaz national project started developing in two versions. Since ethnically they were kin to the Circassian tribes, the logic of ethno-linguistic nationalism naturally pushed the Abkhaz to seek their identity within this realm, in the pan-Circassian movement which was forming on the century-old border. After the Bolshevik revolution this movement gave birth to the short-lived Republic of [Caucasian] Mountain Peoples. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the same idea was revived in the form of a political movement, the Confederation of the Mountainous Peoples of the Caucasus (at some point, "Mountainous" was dropped).

On the other hand, it still mattered that the high culture and political traditions of Abkhaz statehood were traditionally Georgian (though Turkish and Russian elements were added later). The Abkhaz aristocracy was very close to the Georgian, and cultural ties were still considerable. In the administrative sense, *Sukhumskiy okrug* – that is, Abkhazia – was affiliated to *Kutaisskaya guberniya*, or western Georgia. This was the basis for another movement which sought the establishment of Abkhaz identity in close connection to Georgia, though retaining a special status. Of course, initially it was not about political status, because Georgian nationalism itself was still not politicized, but if translated into political terms, "special status within Georgia" would probably describe this trend. In both cases, however, the Abkhaz looked not for autonomy vis-ŕ-vis Russia as a whole, but for some larger cultural entity (Circassian, Georgian) within which it would have a chance to retain its separate identity. In other words, the emerging Abkhaz nationalism did not define itself in terms of relations with Russia as a whole, but sought the locus of a separate Abkhaz identity within the western Caucasian region.

Both trends competed, the former one appearing to get upper hand. In the period of Georgian independence 1918-21, the ethnic Abkhaz elite was divided, with opponents of unity with Georgia in the majority, but the Georgian government was able to combine an alliance with the pro-Georgian section of the Abkhaz elite with military pressure to keep the province within the newly independent Georgia.[10] In the Georgian constitution of 1921, Abkhazia was defined as an autonomous unit within Georgia (this constitution was adopted, however, just four days before Georgian independence ended with the Russian invasion).

The attitude to the Soviet period differs radically in the Georgian and Abkhaz national visions. For the Georgians, the independence that was suspended in 1921 continued symbolically after the break-up of the Soviet Union. This means that nothing that happened during this period of suspension could be called legitimate: everything was imposed by the foreign occupying force. The same cannot be said of the Abkhaz. Since there was no time for the above-mentioned provision of the 1921 Georgian constitution to be implemented, one can only fantasize about what Abkhaz autonomy in an independent Georgia would be like. In reality, however, modern Abkhaz statehood (or, rather, its symbolic prototype) came into existence for the first time under

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10 See, for instance, Stanislav Lakoba, *Abkhaziya posle dvukh okupatsiy*, Gagra, 1994.

Soviet rule. An administrative unit within the Soviet *matryoshka* system of nationalities (that is, one nationally-defined territorial unit containing another one) can hardly be called a real "nation-state", but a Soviet national-territorial unit still had many symbolically important features that contributed to the development of national/political consciousness: the territorial unit was actually called "Abkhazia", and the Abkhaz language was given official status – that is, it became a language of "high culture" with many consequences for bureaucracy, educational policy, literature in Abkhaz language and the like. Thus, unlike the Georgians, the Abkhaz legitimize their post-Soviet claims by referring to the Soviet period of their history (though not to it alone).

The major change that occurred during the Soviet period was that Georgia and Georgians exclusively filled the slot for "enemy image" in the Abkhaz national project. In addition, Russia became the chief protector against "Georgian imperialism". There were several reasons for this. Between 1921 and 1931, the administrative framework of nationalities in the South Caucasus changed several times and, with it, the status of Abkhazia. The Russian Bolsheviks encouraged ethnic minorities in Georgia to rebel against the central government, to make their own conquest of it easier, and they initially welcomed the proclamation of a separate Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic in March 1921 (when the military operation against Georgia was still under way). Later, Abkhazia was made part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic – and, in 1931, an autonomous republic within Georgia.[11] If the republic proclaimed in March 1921 is taken as the reference point, then becoming an autonomous unit within Georgia was a demotion. What was especially important about this, however, was that these events occurred when the Soviet Union was being run by Joseph Stalin, an ethnic Georgian, who was later joined in Moscow by his compatriot, Lavrenti Beria. This allows the Abkhaz to think that the demotion of their status was really an expression of Georgian imperialism: Stalin did it because he was a Georgian.

From the Georgian perspective, however, the whole thing looks completely different. The Georgians' attitude to Stalin is quite controversial, but Georgian nationalists at least regard him as a Russian imperialist who actively sought to conquer Georgia in 1921 – and his actions afterwards can hardly be explained by Georgian patriotism either. No people as few in number as the Abkhaz were granted the status of "full" union republic in the Soviet Union. Abkhazia's becoming part of Georgia can be fully explained by the general logic of the clusterization of Soviet nationalities – why should one refer to a specifically "Georgian" factor in this particular case? Georgians can also argue that if Stalin was responsible for subordinating Abkhazia to Georgia in 1931, then he was also responsible for the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia in 1921. Even if one insists that Stalin's actions were motivated by latent Georgian imperialism, Georgians in general can hardly be held accountable for Soviet nationality policies, whoever carried them out: they never elected those leaders, and were never consulted about what they did.

Apart from this demotion in status, under Stalin's rule the Abkhaz endured a period of Georgian demographic expansion, when some of the ethnic Georgian population was resettled from other parts of Georgia, and a period of a "Georgianization" policy in late 1940s and early 1950s, when the Georgian language was imposed on Abkhaz students in schools and the Abkhaz were forced to use a Georgian-based alphabet instead of a Cyrillic-based one (there exists a unique Georgian

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11 As Georgian authors point out, Abkhazia existed as separate from Georgia only from March to December of 1921, when it was attached to Georgia as "treaty republic", and the Soviet Constitution of 1924 "treated it in fact as an autonomous republic within Georgia", so in 1931 this status was only "made official" (R. Gachechiladze, *New Georgia*, op.cit., p. 33). These legal subtleties, however, may mean much less today in comparison with firm belief prevalent in Abkhaz society that Georgian Stalin attached Abkhazia to Georgia in 1931.

alphabet). These policies aroused in the Abkhaz the above-mentioned fear of extinction as an ethnic group, through forced assimilation. Again, these policies could be explained by the latent "Georgian imperialism" of Stalin and Beria or by another shift in the Soviet nationality policy. I believe that Beria, unlike Stalin, was more of a secret Georgian nationalist, and that that might have had some influence on his decisions regarding Abkhazia – though these kinds of policies were hardly unprecedented in the former Soviet Union. In any case, these changes in Soviet policy substantially increased Abkhaz animosity towards Georgians. The fact that after Stalin's death the policy changed again, this time in favour of the Abkhaz, only reinforced the Abkhaz belief that full responsibility for their deprivations lay with Stalin's and Beria's nationality.

Nor did the system of Soviet ethnic quotas do much to help Georgian-Abkhaz relations. Certain bureaucratic posts were set aside for ethnic Abkhaz, and this, given that the latter comprised only a minority of the population of Abkhazia, was a serious impediment to the careers of the Georgians living in the autonomous republic. Georgians resented this. Some of them registered as ethnic Abkhaz, which increased the resentment of other Georgians even more. The Abkhaz, on the other hand, saw this system (introduced and maintained by Russians) as the main way of safeguarding their interests against the Georgian assault.

Soviet rule contributed in one more way to the deterioration of Georgian-Abkhaz relations. As I said, the Abkhaz aristocracy was more likely than other classes in Abkhaz society to envisage the future of Abkhazia in a union with Georgia. However, it was precisely this group that suffered most disproportionately from the Communist repression. It is difficult to detect here any intention to sever Abkhaz-Georgian relations, but the effect was the same.

Thus, by the end of the Soviet Union, there was only one element of the Abkhaz national vision which was quite unambiguous: Georgians were the enemy. The positive project for political status was not as clear. I see at least two reasons for this. First, as I said, the modern history of Abkhaz statehood started in the Soviet Union, which made the Abkhaz nationalist vision confined to their status within the Russian Empire/Soviet Union. Second, the Abkhaz had a much weaker starting-point than the Georgians: they were much fewer in absolute numbers, they were the minority in Abkhazia, and their status within the USSR was lower than that of Georgia. This meant that unlike the Georgians who (in practical terms, mistakenly) appealed to "international law" to uphold their right to restore full independence, annulled by the Russian/Soviet invasion, the only practical option for the Abkhaz was to appeal to Moscow and the Soviet past before 1931. In saying this I am not repeating the one-sided (and humiliating) version promoted by many Georgians – that Abkhaz separatists are puppets of the Kremlin and have no agenda of their own; but the reality is that when formulating their demands the Abkhaz had to estimate in what circumstances they would have the greatest chances of support from Moscow.

As a result, the positive part of the Abkhaz political project changed with the circumstances, though two underlying ideas remained constant: 1. guarantees of security for the Abkhaz as an ethnic community – thereby preventing the Shapsugh and Ubykh scenario; 2. as much independence from the arch-enemy (Georgia) as possible. Different versions of how to achieve this goal might have been: a) having equal status with Georgia within the Soviet Union – which of course meant separation from Georgia; b) joining the Russian federation with the same status as Abkhazia had in Georgia; c) full independence; d) federal/confederal relations based on an equal treaty with Georgia, which would in fact mean something very close to independence. The first option is no longer feasible, while the other three are still being discussed within Abkhazia and in negotiations led by the Sukhumi government.

The role of chief political patron/ally is, logically, filled by Russia. This alliance is a purely pragmatic one, based on common interests: in so far as both see Georgian nationalists as the enemy, they have a reason for coordinating their actions. The Russians can use the Abkhaz against the Tbilisi government, while the Abkhaz do not have a wide choice of powerful allies

other than anti-Georgian forces in Moscow. This is not a sentimental alliance, of course, and the Abkhaz can hardly forget their experience of *Mokhajirstvo* (which they cannot blame on Georgians) or the tragic story of the Ubykhs and Shapsugs (nor did the more recent experience of the Chechen war do much to strengthen their trust in Russia). It has become quite evident to the Abkhaz that Russia is simply making use of them without being in any way committed to their security. The sentimental allies are the blood brethren in the Northern Caucasus: ethno-linguistically related peoples who showed their solidarity by actually spilling blood in the war of 1992-93. These two alliances, however, contradict each other and often put the Abkhaz in an awkward situation. During the meetings of the "Confederation of the Mountainous Peoples", while everybody else was involved in intense Russia-bashing, the Abkhaz had to say that Russia was not as bad as all that and was sometimes "constructive". Since the Chechen Republic is now seeking active cooperation with Georgia and Chechen officials often publicly denounce Chechen participation in the war with Georgia as a "mistake", it is becoming evident that pragmatic considerations have to take precedence over a sentimental vision of pan-Caucasian ethnic solidarity. This means that as long as confrontation with Georgia continues, the Abkhaz still have no allies to rely on besides Russia.

The Abkhaz also have a dual cultural orientation. Their awareness of kinship with the Circassian peoples is the natural place for the Abkhaz to locate their cultural identity within the Caucasian realm. However, despite the undoubted popularity of the concept of a common Caucasian culture (and "Caucasian Home"), so far nobody has conceptualized this common-ness in a way that would make it fit into the modern world. "Caucasian-ness" is intuitively associated with ancient traditions of hospitality, highly ritualistic behaviour and a machistic glorification of militancy – something which has few chances of surviving the erosive forces of modernization. The Chechens have increasingly turned to Islam – but this is unlikely to happen with the Abkhaz: ethnic Abkhaz include both Christians and Muslims, and most are hardly religious at all. Recently, an Abkhaz newspaper reported that the curriculum of the first private Abkhaz school in the capital, Sukhumi, would include a new subject: Christian ethics,[12] something scarcely compatible with a Muslim-oriented culture. Abkhazia was very much Russified when in the Soviet Union: Russian was the *lingua franca* for its multiethnic population, and the domination of the Russian language was exacerbated by the fact that it was one of the most popular resort areas in the former Soviet Union. The Abkhaz elites are very Russified linguistically and, despite recent disappointments, culturally they remain very firmly oriented towards Russia (in contrast to the Chechens).

The attitude to political models and ideologies is also contingent on the political situation. In the final years of the Soviet Union, the Abkhaz sided with non-democratic forces standing for the preservation of the unified state. When Georgian troops entered Abkhazia in August 1992, they destroyed not only symbols of separate Abkhaz statehood, but statues of Lenin as well. Later, too, the Abkhaz tended to look for allies among Russian neo-Communists and nationalists. This does not mean that the Abkhaz are by nature less inclined to democracy than the Georgians. It just so happens that anti-democrats in Russia are more anti-Georgian (and hence pro-Abkhaz) than democrats. Many democratically-minded Russians also empathize emotionally with the Abkhaz cause but, as a political force, the Russian democrats (or "so-called democrats") still tend to respect Georgia's independence and territorial integrity more than their opponents.

While not as politically ambitious as the Georgian variety (that is, it does not insist on full independence), Abkhaz nationalism seems to be stronger and more intense. This is probably due to the fact that the Abkhaz face – or believe they are facing – physical extinction. While Georgians have a recent record of fighting not only with the Abkhaz and Ossetes, but also with each other, the Abkhaz have so far succeeded in keeping their political differences hidden (in the face of the "common enemy"). While Georgians have had their moments of weakness, and in the wake of

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12 "Private Schools Should Exist", *Respublika Abkhazia,* 15-17 January 1997, p. 3.

losing the war in 1993 were close to giving up their independence (in return for favours from Russia), the Abkhaz have so far expressed much greater firmness in their stand.

Possible Scenarios for Conflict Development

I have taken all this time to describe both parties' different ways of viewing the political status of Abkhazia because I wanted to demonstrate two points. First, I wanted to show why it was that, once the cultural and political elites of both peoples felt free to express their visions (which started to happen around 1988), they would inevitably clash, and since it was these political visions of sovereignty that commanded human minds, there were grounds for a serious conflict. On the other hand, however, I do not think that this conflict was doomed to have the bloody consequences it did.

The conflict was unavoidable because each side had a radically different answer to the fundamental question: "What is Abkhazia?" For the Georgians, the answer was clear: "Abkhazia is Georgia". This was a slogan carried by demonstrators in March and April of 1989 when, for the first time during *perestroika*, the issue of Abkhazia became the subject of mass politics. It meant: "Abkhazia is an inseparable part of Georgia, just like any other historical Georgian province – Kakhety, Imerety, Samegrelo, etc." For the Abkhaz side it was equally clear that this answer was wrong. "Abkhazia is Abkhazia" – this is how Stanislav Lakoba, of the secessionist fraction of the Abkhazian parliament, entitled one of his articles published in the West.[13] It should be pointed out that, during the war, this was not the only Abkhaz answer: another influential representative of the Abkhaz nationalist movement, Zurab Achba, published an article in the Russian press entitled "Abkhazia is Russia". This was a clear attempt to attract Russian support and it may not have expressed the true feelings of the Abkhaz, but still, it was possible for a prominent Abkhaz nationalist to say this in print. At any rate, the bottom line was the same in both cases: "Abkhazia is *not* Georgia". This was a fundamental conflict, and though one could fantasize about how the history of Georgia or the Caucasus might have developed were it not for the Russian involvement, at the time the problem could not be explained away simply as a Kremlin conspiracy, or even as a clash between the selfish Georgian and Abkhaz "ethnocracies". The conflict was between the views of the overwhelming majority of Georgians and Abkhaz. It was the kind of issue on which it would be very difficult to reach a compromise. It was enough for the radicals on both sides to make the self-fulfilling prophecy that the problem could only be solved by bringing the prevailing power (Russian, Georgian or whatever) into the equation, rather than through agreement and compromise.

Still, I believe that if my above description of national projects is correct there was considerable space for compromise. Yes, the Abkhaz saw the Georgians as enemy number one. But they were not insisting on full independence. The basic Abkhaz concern was their fear of extinction as a separate ethnic community (the "Ubykh scenario"). Georgians could have taken this as a starting point in their attitude. A large majority of the Georgian elite recognizes the "autochthonous" status of the Abkhaz on their territory (a very powerful category in Caucasian politics – however illiberal and "non-constructivist" this may sound to many outsiders): it is widely accepted that the Abkhaz are the only ethnic group in Georgia (save for the Georgians themselves) who have no other homeland, so that it is legitimate for them to have some sort of special territorial and political arrangement which would guarantee the preservation of their identity. As I said, the constitution of the independent Georgia, adopted in 1921, also provided for that status. In the middle of the recent war, the Georgian parliament adopted a law which proclaimed the Abkhaz

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13 *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1995, pp. 97-105.

language to be the second state language on the territory of Abkhazia, and future new immigrants were to be given the option of studying either Georgian or Abkhaz in order to obtain citizenship.

Presumably, this contradicts a "pure" idea of the nation-state: if the Abkhaz are a separate nation, why not let them have their own independent nation-state? If Abkhazia is a legitimate part of Georgia, how come the Abkhaz are non-Georgians? Georgians usually appeal to the above-mentioned age-old tradition of political and cultural unity, and to the fact that ethnic Georgians have always lived in Abkhazia alongside the Abkhaz. Of course there were more radical anti-Abkhaz sentiments as well, including calls for abolishing Abkhaz autonomy, but never – even during the war – did they become official policy.[14] To account for this inconsistency – and justify more radical claims – a different theory was invoked, based on the work of the Georgian historian Pavle Ingoroqua. According to this theory, the "real" or historical Abkhaz were a Georgian tribe, while in the 17th and 18th centuries Adighean tribes (known to themselves as the *Apsua*) resettled from the North Caucasus, assimilated the "real" Abkhaz and stole their name. This theory was never shared by the majority of Georgian historians, but in the course of the conflict it was widely propagated by such radical nationalist leaders as Akaki Bakradze, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and others. The theory made everything very simple: as Gamsakhurdia said at rallies, the Abkhaz claims to self-determination were justified, but the territory was wrong: let them return to the North Caucasus and we will support their struggle there (as, later, Gamsakhurdia actually did support the Chechen bid for self-determination). In this way, the very existence of the Abkhaz autonomy was delegitimized.

This approach was frequently repeated by radical leaders and was often presented by the Abkhaz elites as the only Georgian position. Many Georgian leaders, however, did not take this attitude too seriously themselves, but thought it wise to adopt it in order to counter the claims made by the Abkhaz radicals. Gamsakhurdia himself frequently adjusted his assessment of Abkhaz history to the changing political situation.

On the Abkhaz side, strong anti-Georgian feelings certainly constituted a very important factor. But since they were mostly rooted in the recollection of the recent Soviet past, there was always a possibility of convincing the Abkhaz (however difficult this might be) that Stalin and Beria's policy had nothing to do with the will of the Georgian people. Anti-Georgian feelings among the Abkhaz were not countered by proportionate anti-Abkhaz feelings among Georgians, because the role of enemy had been taken by Russia, and Georgians felt threatened not by the Abkhaz *per se*, but by the prospect of the Abkhaz issue being used against them by Russia. Fewer than 100,000 ethnic Abkhaz could not on their own be considered a serious security threat to Georgia (at least, this was what Georgians thought), and introducing particular arrangements guaranteeing special rights for the Abkhaz as an ethnic community, as well as corresponding political status for Abkhazia as a territory – with the Abkhaz giving up their pro-Russian tendencies in return – would be quite acceptable to the Georgian public. It would probably cause some discontent among ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia, but a clear and firm stance by the Tbilisi government could take care of that.

Georgian willingness to accept special status and privileges for the Abkhaz was influenced by the fact that, in the Soviet Union, Abkhazian autonomy in practice meant not "Abkhazianization" but Russification. There was no conflict between the Abkhaz and Georgian languages in Abkhazia, it

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14 "The Georgian government and public have never questioned the status of Abkhazia. I am declaring this to everybody, to the whole world, to the Abkhaz: extensive autonomy will be guaranteed, the rights of every Abkhaz will be guaranteed" – Eduard Shevardnadze's speech to the joint sitting of the Defence Council and Council of Ministers of Abkhazia on 6 July 1993, *Sakartvelos Respublika*, 8 July 1993. One can argue that part of the Georgian public did question Abkhaz autonomy and that some government officials (such as Minister of Defence Kitovani) denounced autonomy in personal interviews, but in principle Shevardnadze's assertion (and many more statements like this may be quoted) is correct.

was Georgian and Russian that were really competing. In the late seventies, the Abkhaz university was opened in Sukhumi in response to Abkhaz demands, with Abkhaz and Georgian departments. The Abkhaz department, however, was really a Russian-language university (save for a few courses in humanities), while the Georgian department was Georgian-language. Not much Abkhaz was taught in secondary schools or other colleges either. Thus, to the extent that Georgians saw the problem in the context of relations with Russia, the "Abkhazianization of Abkhazia" – in so far as it would reduce the cultural predominance of Russian – would be an acceptable scenario to moderate nationalists.

There were projects to help the Abkhaz "Abkhazianize" by translating and publishing Abkhaz-language textbooks, etc. The more radically anti-Georgian Abkhaz saw in this a Georgian trick to alienate the Abkhaz from their Russian allies. With some reason, probably – but in that case, what was the real Abkhaz project? Of course, the Abkhaz were free to choose Russification as their national project, but then all the talk about their fear of an "Ubykh scenario" would lose credibility. The Georgians did seem to have a point here.

On the Abkhaz side, this compromise would have been difficult to accept, since the image of "Georgian imperialism" seemed deep-rooted enough. Certain tensions would have run for a long time. But, however much the Abkhaz might have resented the fact of Georgian plurality on Abkhaz territory as a result of the Georgian "imperial policy", it was now a reality they would have had to accept. It was not difficult to calculate that relying too much on Russian help was not necessarily wise. And, if the real issue was to obtain guarantees that a separate Abkhaz ethnic identity would be preserved, then the Georgian argument that the Abkhaz would hardly be safer as part of Russia than part of Georgia was quite plausible: the fate of the Abkhaz' ethnic brethren in the northern Caucasus, as well as the fate of the Abkhaz themselves in the 19th century, were all too obvious evidence of this. Of course, there were many symbolical issues related to words: the Abkhaz happened to hate the word "autonomy", and the Georgians found it hard to comprehend how a "republic" could contain another "republic". But a certain amount of political cunning could have helped overcome these obstacles, so that a face-saving compromise could still have been achieved without any unravelling of the basics of each side's national project. It would not have been easy, and even in the best possible conditions it would probably have taken a long time to arrive at some kind of "finally acceptable" model – but interim solutions in the course of negotiations could have been even more important, because they would have stressed the possibility of a compromise between both parties.

Of course, this imagined scenario would have required a very big and problematic "if": the assumption of prudence, patience, rationality and sensitivity on the part of those directly involved in the conflict. The powerful third party (the Soviet "Centre", later Russia) would also have had to refrain obligingly from any attempt to manipulate the conflict in its own (real or imagined) interest. None of these preconditions was present, however. Indeed, it would require explanation if the new players, freshly emerging from political nothingness, actually had displayed such qualities.

Why the War?

I emphasize these factors to make my main point: the emergence of nationalism – that is, the idea of the nation-state – as the universal model of state-building, is in general responsible for the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. But why this conflict eventually led to ethnic violence is a different story, and one that requires different *explananda*.

These explanatory factors may be divided into two major categories: one set may be grouped under the heading of "political immaturity" or "lack of political skills"; the other would come

under "specific circumstances". I will start with some of the features under the first heading (in a list which makes no claim to being exhaustive):

1. *Giving precedence to ethno-historical rather than democratic legitimacy*. Both sides sincerely believed in the fairness of their respective claims, founding them on their visions of history (which I have tried to outline roughly above). Although ethno-demographic changes had occurred following "illegitimate" acts of conquest or imperial conspiracy, the interests of the real people who might be living on a specific territory as a result of this policy, but who could not be held responsible for it, were easily discounted. This was the Georgian attitude to the Ossetians, who, thanks to the Soviet policy, had become a majority in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, and especially its capital Tskhinvali. The Abkhaz viewed the Georgians living in Abkhazia in the same way. The Abkhaz problem has become an issue of mass politics in Georgia since February 1989, when the ethnic Abkhaz population of Abkhazia gathered in the village of Lykhny to declare their demand for separation from Georgia and inclusion in the Russian federation. It was taken for granted that the wish of the Abkhaz ethnic community could be presented as the wish of Abkhazia because, whatever the current ethno-demographic situation, the historical rights of the Abkhaz community should take precedence over the will of the total population of the territory called "Abkhazia". Later, the Abkhaz leaders started to emphasize the multi-ethnic character of their national movement, but in reality this multi-ethnicism was a (reasonably successful) attempt to forge an "everybody against the Georgians" coalition.

   Of course, Georgian nationalists, especially in Gamsakhurdia's era, were not exactly sensitive to minority issues either. According to many accounts, "Georgia for the Georgians" was Gamsakhurdia's slogan, though this in fact is not true – I personally never saw this kind of slogan at his rallies, nor have I seen anybody quoting any source on this – but it probably did express his true attitude. It is easy to find plenty of downright racist quotations from the Georgian press of that period. The difference here, however, is that at least Georgian nationalists could refer to the democratic legitimacy of majority rule in this case, which the Abkhaz could not.

2. *The revolutionary, confrontational mood of early nationalistic movements*. In its style, the Georgian nationalist movement was probably the most radical in the former Soviet Union, at least among the movements at Union Republic level. This radicalism was targeted primarily against the imperial "centre", not ethnic minorities. It implied a symbolic rejection of cooperation with the "occupying forces", and hence a refusal to take part in the "Soviet" elections. "Compromise", and even more so "concession", or even "realism", were dirty words, semantically associated with "cowardice" at best, at worst with "betrayal". Even though some Georgian nationalists did want to cut deals with rebellious minorities, they found it difficult to overcome this attitude and sell any compromise solutions to their supporters. Nor were the Abkhaz immune from this glorification of radicalism.

3. *Simplistic approach: single enemy image as the exclusive point of reference*. The world view professed by mass nationalism on its heroic-revolutionary stage is usually very simple: everything is reduced to the confrontation "our enemy versus us". For Georgians, therefore, the Abkhaz problem did not exist in its own right: it was merely a corollary to the problem "Empire vs. Georgia". Whenever the Abkhaz raised any claims that were not acceptable, they were to be treated merely as puppets willing to be manipulated by the Russians. The fact that the Abkhaz did in fact seek an alliance with Russia lent credibility to this image. But it would have been in the Georgian interest to win over or "seduce" the Abkhaz by proposing them a better deal, rather than portraying their claims as inspired by Russia in the first place. However, the art of political seduction was not something the Georgian radicals had mastered – or even thought it necessary to learn. Many Abkhaz, in turn, seemed blinded by the single

enemy image of "Georgian imperialism" or "Georgian fascism" and made little effort to look beyond it.

4. *Lack of will to take responsibility for the problem, expressing itself in appeals to the third party*. Simplistic images of the world promoted by radical nationalist ideologues are the result not only of their simple-mindedness, but of their reluctance to take responsibility for real problems. Using the Russian conspiracy theory to explain away the very existence of the Abkhaz problem and portraying Abkhaz nationalists as nothing more than Russian puppets was a way of avoiding reality. But, for obvious reasons, the refusal to face a problem dramatically reduces the chances of solving it. After the end of the war, the Georgian government changed its policy, trying to deal with the Abkhaz problem through cooperation with Russia; this in principle implied greater political pragmatism (the necessity to reach some compromise with the Russian power was acknowledged), but the old pattern of avoiding the problem still continued. The deal with Russia, as seen by the ruling part of the Georgian political elite, may be summarized as follows: we will accept the disgrace of giving up substantial elements of our sovereignty, but you solve the Abkhaz problem for us. Georgians did not seem to think too much about how, specifically, this would happen: if the Russians were able to create the mess in the first place, they should know how to clean it up.

   The Abkhaz did not have the luxury of blaming the Georgian problem on somebody else: "Georgian fascism" was an evil in itself and they had to deal with it. But they also found it difficult to accept that they had to deal with it on their own. Many steps taken by the Abkhaz government, especially before the war, were reckless and obviously provocative to the Georgians, and it is hard to imagine that they would have been able to take them without the hope of Russian help.[15] Arguably, their gamble paid off, but there were no guarantees of this in the beginning, even though what was at stake was the very physical existence of the Abkhaz nation.

5. *Anti-political mood and lack of confidence*. This factor may be regarded as the base from which all the above may be deduced – though it is not easy sum it up briefly. While expressing their readiness to fight and make sacrifices in order to achieve independence, Georgians were at the same time deeply sceptical about government (even if it was their own). An anti-political attitude is hardly confined to the Caucasus, and it is far beyond the scope of this paper to judge how much this is the *Zeitgeist* of our times or how much the alienation of the people from politics is the legacy of Communist totalitarianism. It is clear, though, that recent Georgian history presents numerous examples of this trend. In the military domain, it was expressed by the total inability to build a viable regular army, so that the outcome of the war – and the fate of the country – depended on the enthusiasm and political preferences of irregular voluntary groups, which it was hardly possible to control. With an "army" like this, any military operation would soon degenerate into a spree of abuse, looting and also ethnic violence – as was the case in many post-Communist countries.

The deficit of political confidence stemming from lack of experience in managing one's own affairs is another possible explanation for the same phenomenon. The Georgians were fervent nationalists, but at the same time not overly confident in their ability to build a state and pursue their objectives through consistent political work oriented towards long-term objectives. This lack of confidence showed itself, especially at the first stage of the independence movement, in the propensity to impulsive and theatrical actions rather than systematic efforts. In this, Georgia presents a stark contrast to the Baltic states, whose people showed a much greater capacity for organization and orderly political action. A higher political culture in a normative sense –

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15 Actions by the Abkhaz government are described in Svetlana Chervonnaya, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shadow*, Somerset, Gothic Image Publications, 1994.

whether to be explained by different civic culture in general or by the more recent experience of political independence – may account for the success of Baltic political elites in preventing their "ethnic conflicts" with the Russian population from degenerating into violence.

It must be pointed out that, under traditions and circumstances which foster anti-political sentiments, the smaller group in the conflict – which feels that its very existence is threatened (Abkhaz, Chechens, Kosovo Albanians, etc.) – has paradoxical advantages: in the absence of state-political traditions and the respect for formal order and discipline that comes with them, ethnic solidarity and a siege mentality fill the gap.

Nevertheless, these factors, based on the communist legacy or political culture, should not be treated as constants. On both sides, neither the political elite nor the public was fully devoid of common sense, and they could also learn from political experience. Georgian nationalists understood quite clearly from the very beginning that internal conflicts in Georgia diminished the chances of their movement in its fight with Moscow for independence, and at least some factions within it tried to avoid direct confrontation with minority separatist movements and/or tried to find some compromise with them – albeit not always skilfully enough. Some politicians, like Gamsakhurdia, willingly played the ethnic card because it brought political dividends. But other leaders sharply criticized him for that and even pointed to his methods of arousing ethnic sentiments as proof that he was a "Moscow agent".

But when the same Gamsakhurdia actually became leader of Georgia, he grew much more pragmatic. Shortly before the elections of 1990 he even reversed his demand for the abolition of the South Ossetian Autonomy, although (unlike in the case of Abkhazia) most of the Georgian public did not regard this autonomy as legitimate. Here it proved to be too late: the Ossetians held elections just a few days after the Georgian ones and proclaimed their independence, so Gamsakhurdia could think of nothing better than to abolish Ossetian autonomy, thereby exacerbating hostilities in the region. But with Abkhazia he was much more cautious. Once in power, he never questioned the Abkhaz right to autonomy and, in 1991, actually did reach a compromise with the Abkhaz leaders, making concessions which were quite substantial from the Georgian perspective. This agreement was based on an electoral law which introduced *de facto* ethnic quotas. The Abkhaz ethnic community (17% of the population) received 28 seats in the 65-seat Abkhaz parliament, while ethnic Georgians (46%) took 26 seats. The rest of the population, i.e., 37%, were represented by the 11 remaining seats only. A two-thirds majority was required for making decisions on constitutional issues, which meant that agreement between the two communities was necessary. This system was introduced for the parliamentary elections in the autumn of 1992.

This agreement later proved not to work, and was hardly viable in the long run. In Georgian society especially, it was later very strongly criticized as an "apartheid law". But the fact was that the Georgians and the Abkhaz, represented by such strongly nationalist leaders as Gamsakhurdia and Ardzinba, did reach this compromise, and they did so without any direct external pressure or third-party mediators (perhaps it was precisely the mess in Moscow after the August putsch that allowed them to do this). The agreement was based on exactly the same political principles as the ones outlined above: the Abkhazian side agreed to have its fate resolved within the framework of the Georgian state, while Tbilisi recognized the special rights of the Abkhaz as the only ethnic minority in Georgia that was "autochthonous" and had no other homeland elsewhere. Nobody was completely happy about the arrangement, but this can be said of all political compromises. The ethnic Georgian community in Abkhazia had a particularly strong reason to be unhappy as they were under-represented.

If Abkhazia, with its ethnic demography of 1991, had been a really independent country, this Lebanese-type arrangement would probably have led sooner or later to a similar conflict between ethnic communities seeking a re-distribution of quotas for government office. But Abkhazia was

not, and in the event of "normal" developments in Georgia proper, there would have been no need to unravel this agreement. The central government in Tbilisi, which had a clear interest in stability in one of its provinces and in legitimizing the agreement it had itself signed, could have played the game of limiting the discontent of the ethnic Georgian community in Abkhazia, thereby eventually gaining greater trust from the ethnic Abkhaz community. Once the first tide of particularly intense nationalism were over, the government would have been able to afford this kind of game.

To be sure, this rosy scenario can no longer be checked (while this author is exposed to possible accusations of "unscientific" fantasizing). Objections may be raised that the fragile 1991 agreement was doomed to end in a bloody clash anyway. Although not a fan of political arrangements based on ethnic quotas, I still think that the symbolism of having reached an agreement was in itself very important, and could provide a solid basis for further work – though this would be difficult work. But the reality was that the developments in Georgia were far from "normal" (and this was what I meant by "special political circumstances"). As a result of the December-January coup of 1991-92 the authoritarian, allegedly mentally unstable and obviously politically incapable President Gamsakhurdia was deposed by a strange coalition of nationalist military insurgents, liberal democrats and Communist *nomenklatura*. This led to a long period of political uncertainty and disorder in the country. A couple of month after the coup, the former Communist leader of Georgia and former foreign minister of the Soviet Union, Eduard Shevardnadze, was invited to help put Georgia straight. He was reasonably successful, but it took a good deal of time and, amongst other things, it cost him Abkhazia.

Whatever the reasons for the Georgian turmoil,[16] it endangered the volatile political balance in Abkhazia as well as in relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. There were several reasons for and aspects to this:

1. *The new Georgian authorities had no interest in promoting the legitimacy of the Georgian-Abkhaz agreement reached by Gamsakhurdia*. The delegitimization of Gamsakhurdia was the most urgent political task facing the new authorities, and since the ousted president was accusing Shevardnadze of being Moscow's man, Shevardnadze's supporters had to counter these accusations by showing that it was Gamsakhurdia who was not really ardent enough about safeguarding Georgian national interests. The Georgian-Abkhaz agreement, which discriminated against ethnic Georgians on the "apartheid" basis, was the obvious target. It was not officially said that the agreement should not actually be honoured, and the new government was not at all more anti-Abkhaz or anti-minority than the previous one (quite the reverse, it also accused Gamsakhurdia of "parochial fascism" and wanted its minority policy to be much more liberal and citizenship-oriented), but the criticism of the agreement in fact eroded the basis of its legitimacy.
2. *While Gamsakhurdia's credibility as a nationalist leader had allowed him to make concessions such as those in the Abkhaz case, the legitimacy of the new Georgian authorities was founded on a much narrower base*, especially before new elections were held in October 1992. Moreover, though Shevardnadze was the national leader, he did not really control the government or, especially, the armed formations. So the new government could not make any important decisions on Abkhazia, much less reach important compromises, as it was afraid of jeopardizing the fragile pro-Shevardnadze coalition.
3. *Most of the ethnic Georgian population in Abkhazia supported Gamsakhurdia rather than Shevardnadze*. Moreover, several districts adjacent to Abkhazia were actually controlled by pro-Gamsakhurdia groups openly hostile to the new government (the population of these districts, as well as most ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia, are Megrelians, which is a distinct

16 In this context, see my "Georgia's Identity Crisis", *Journal of Democracy*, 1995/1, pp. 104-116.

sub-ethnic group in Georgia to which Gamsakhurdia also belonged and which was more supportive of him). This, naturally, seriously diminished the chances the Tbilisi government had of making an impact on Abkhazia and, on the contrary, gave the ethnic Abkhaz faction in the Abkhaz government more room to manoeuvre. The Georgian faction in the parliament, though for the most part loyal to Tbilisi, was also confused and did not know how to deal with the situation. The Abkhazian parliament divided into two factions, pro-Abkhaz and pro-Georgian (34 and 31 MPs respectively, after the third-party deputies chose to join one of the two ethnic factions), each one unwilling to cooperate.

4. *The open challenge to the Georgian-Abkhaz agreement came, however, not from the Georgian but from the Abkhaz side*. Apparently, the ethnic Abkhaz faction of the Abkhazian leadership, under Ardzinba, saw a window of opportunity in the breakdown of authority and legitimacy in Georgia. Georgia was weak and divided, its new government lacked both popular and formal legitimacy, and Abkhazia was separated from the territory under the control of the Georgian authorities by what the Abkhaz strategists called the "Megrelian pillow" (regions controlled by pro-Gamsakhurdia forces). They also felt that they had to seize their chance while they had it, because the situation in Georgia could eventually improve. The ethnic Abkhaz faction, with its small majority, decided to forget the agreement and ignore the ethnic Georgian faction in the Abkhaz parliament altogether (the latter's leadership displayed no political skills and could not think of anything better to do than to boycott sessions – but it did not have too many options anyway). The ethnic Georgian Minister of the Interior was forcibly removed from office and replaced by an ethnic Abkhaz (the distribution of major positions in the executive had also been part of the agreement). In July came the most provocative decision: the ethnic Abkhaz faction of Abkhazian parliament, using its slim majority, restored a 1925 constitution for Abkhazia, according to which it was not part of Georgia (the text adopted was actually a draft that had been rejected in 1925, but this is a detail). The legal pretext for this was the fact that in February 1992 the Georgian Military Council formally restored the powers granted under the 1921 constitution, thereby allegedly abolishing Abkhaz autonomy. The decision taken by the Georgian military authorities was certainly not very far-sighted: it was designed to appease radical nationalist groups who wanted symbolically to emphasize legal continuity with the Georgian Republic of 1918-21, but this constitution did also make provision for Abkhaz autonomy. The declaration by the Military Council also stipulated that the 1921 Constitution was reinvoked "without changing existing borders or territorial/administrative arrangements (the status of the Abkhazian and Ajarian autonomous Republics)". In any case, by taking this step the ethnic Abkhaz faction brought on the final collapse of the Georgian-Abkhaz agreement of 1991, the essence of which was that the Abkhazian parliament could make no constitutional changes by a simple majority, i.e., without the consent of the two communal factions (the arcane Abkhaz justification for this step was that it was only adopting a new constitution, not restoring the old one, that called for a two-thirds majority).

This open rebuttal of the 1991 agreement by the ethnic Abkhaz faction implied a *de facto* restoration of the concept that the historical right of the ethnic Abkhaz community took precedence over the democratic rights of the current Abkhaz population. It amounted to a latent declaration of war on the Georgian community in Abkhazia and on Tbilisi, and significantly strengthened the position of those factions in the Georgian leadership who believed that military methods were best in dealing with Ardzinba. This is not to imply that starting the war was a good idea on the Georgian side, but simply that an extremely dangerous gamble by Ardzinba's government lent an important element of legitimacy to the Georgian military effort.

To what extent can one say that Ardzinba deliberately tried to provoke a violent reaction from the Georgian side? One can find some logic to such provocation if it is remembered that the pre-

war ethnic and demographic situation in Abkhazia – i.e., the fact that the ethnic Georgian population outnumbered the Abkhaz by about two and a half to one – was something that concerned Abkhaz nationalists more than anything else, and was considered to be the most dangerous legacy of "Georgian imperialism". War was the only way to change that. If post-communist ethnic wars are about ethnic cleansing, then in this case it was the Abkhaz side that needed it (in the South Ossetian case, according to the same logic, it was the Georgian side that needed the change in the ethno-demographic balance, and hence had a vested interest in starting the war). An assurance of military help from Russia would make the project look promising. If Ardzinba really believed that the Georgians were as inherently genocidal a tribe as he often portrays them, then living together with the Georgian plurality was certainly a bleak perspective for his people. This makes a desperate gamble, which would bring neither final victory nor final destruction, psychologically understandable.

However, a really confident answer to this question would require a much more thorough knowledge of the situation in Abkhazia and the mood of the Abkhaz leadership before the war. My preliminary hypothesis is based on my observation of other post-communist leaders: a clear and coherent calculation of different possible scenarios resulting from their actions is not one of their more striking characteristics. The theory of rational choice is not necessarily applicable here. The crisis in Georgia may have created a mood of "now or never" among the ethnic Abkhaz leadership, and their actions seem to have been quite compatible with this mood. Instinctively, they may have been driven to the violent outcome, which is not the same as saying that they had a clear and coldly calculated plan to provoke a war.

The War and its Results

How and why the war in Abkhazia started in August 1992 and why it ended the way it did in September 1993 is a big topic which has many political and military aspects. Many events are hidden and a number of mysteries may remain unsolved for a long time to come, if not for ever. I will only share observations on some key points.

The beginning of the war is one of them. According to the official Georgian version, the Georgian troops entered Abkhazia to guard highways and railways, but since they met with resistance from the Abkhaz militia, which was an illegal armed formation, it was natural that the government troops should try to suppress this resistance and also depose those who inspired it – the separatist Abkhaz government led by Ardzinba. Even if this official reason for the military operation was just a pretext, it was a pretty good pretext: the situation on the railways and highways really was desperate, owing to subversive activities by pro-Gamsakhurdia guerrillas, and since some of them also operated on the territory of Abkhazia the military operation had to comprise Abkhazia as well.

The question is, however, what one is to understand by the "Georgian government" or the "Georgian army", and who really controlled what. The real decision-making body in Georgia at that time was the four-member "Presidium of the State Council", consisting of Shevardnadze, two warlords (Kitovani and Ioseliani) and Prime Minister Sigua, who routinely sided with Kitovani. We are unlikely ever to find out exactly what happened at those meetings – and whether or not the actions of specific leaders followed collective decisions taken there. Shevardnadze's supporters always maintained in private that he really did not want this war, that it was the result of unauthorized actions by Kitovani, which he later had to legitimize. Shevardnadze's public speeches are not always models of lucidity and consistency but, especially since Kitovani and later Ioseliani were removed from power and eventually put in jail, the Georgian president retrospectively tends to attribute to them the responsibility for starting the Abkhaz war.

There are serious reasons to believe that Shevardnadze did not want the war to start. He is an extremely able political schemer, but strategic military planning is hardly his strong point, as was revealed during the war. The war situation strengthened the warlords, thereby diminishing his personal power. He put the war in South Ossetia to an end as soon as the level of his limited power allowed him to do so (in July 1992) – thereby creating almost open discontent among some military leaders. During the Abkhaz war, he pushed for cease-fires and agreements even though they later proved to be militarily disastrous for the Georgian side. Some neutral observers who saw him in the early days of the war testify that he was personally devastated.

This seems to be contradicted by the fact that on the eve of the Georgian military operation Shevardnadze went on Georgian television to announce the plan. Of course, he only spoke about guarding highways and railways, which was a perfectly constitutional matter, and his threats could have been interpreted as being aimed at the Zviadists (Gamsakhurdia's supporters) rather than the Ardzinba government. But he certainly understood that military resistance by the Abkhaz was quite possible. He claimed that the plan for the Georgian military operation had been cleared with Ardzinba, which the latter denies (again, who can check?), but even if Ardzinba had accepted the plan, how could he be trusted? And, on the other hand, how could his own warlords be trusted?

I can only build a hypothesis based on the general situation at the time and on my understanding of Shevardnadze's character and priorities. His attitude was really ambivalent. He did not want a war in Abkhazia, but he was in a desperate situation in western Georgia where Zviadist militias humiliated the government, virtually controlled the railway and had taken several high-ranking officials from Tbilisi as hostages, with no prospect of improvement in sight. He had to do something resolute about it. And he was also under strong pressure from the military leaders, who were demanding firm action against the Zviadists (who also operated on part of the Abkhazian territory). At some point, he yielded to this pressure, and he probably had some promise from the military that they would not become involved in direct hostilities with Ardzinba and his forces. It might have been reckless to believe this promise, but it was hardly in his power to stop them if *both* military leaders supported the military action. The only other option would have been resignation – which would have been a noble but extremely irresponsible act at that point.

Once the military operation started, he lost all control over it, at least for a period. Later, however, he tried to regain control and stopped Georgian troops from attempting to take Gudauta, where Ardzinba's government had taken refuge. Later, Kitovani, the head of the military operation, openly complained that "the parties" (his euphemism for civilian politicians supporting Shevardnadze) "tied his hands" and would not let him march on Gudauta. Shevardnadze had two different explanations for why he prevented this: first he referred to humanitarian considerations, because if troops occupied Gudauta, the region most densely populated with ethnic Abkhaz, it would indeed be a humanitarian disaster. Apart from that, he also understood that, even if Gudauta were taken, there would be continuous guerrilla warfare which he wanted to avoid, and at the time he may have believed (erroneously) that some kind of deal with the more moderate Abkhaz leaders was still possible. The second explanation is simpler: the Russian military detachment stationed in Gudauta openly threatened Shevardnadze that they would stop Georgian troops, and Shevardnadze backed off. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Of course, once the war was under way, Shevardnadze tried at least to take advantage of the situation in his fight against the "Zviadists". His success in this was only partial: Megrelian regions too far away for Shevardnadze's propaganda to reach still supported Gamsakhurdia, although when Georgian television broadcast meetings of North Caucasian leaders discussing giving military help to the Abkhaz against the Georgians, with Gamsakhurdia taking part in the discussion, viewers naturally did start to question Gamsakhurdia's patriotism.

Shevardnadze's ambivalent attitude towards the war continued throughout it and constituted, I think, one of the *reasons for Georgia's military defeat*. The Georgian leader displayed great personal audacity in showing up at the most dangerous spots and gaining popularity among the soldiers. He probably did what he believed was best for what he repeatedly called a "dignified end to the war". But he also saw that the war situation was strengthening the warlords, thus endangering not only his own personal position, but also prospects for enforcing law and order in the country. It is debatable whether or not he was actually afraid of strengthening the army, but the fact is he did not try too hard to mobilize the country's resources to that end. On the other hand he, like most Georgians, believed that the war was really with Russia, and he reiterated that its fate would be decided in Moscow. Hence he did not really believe in Georgian military efforts because he did not believe that Georgia could win the war with Russia: the war in Chechnya had not yet happened, and a – partly irrational – awe of Russian military power was still intact. He saw the war effort as doomed and wanted to pull out of it as soon as possible, though cutting some deal involving Russian guarantees (which is why he preferred to speak not about "victory" in the war, but about its "dignified ending" – whatever that meant). He wanted this so much that he deceived himself into signing agreements that proved disastrous for Georgia. The September 1992 agreement with the Abkhaz brokered by Russian President Yeltsin, though it seemed to be so favourable to the Georgian side, ended up losing it the northern part of Abkhazia – and thus control over the border with Russia – while another agreement, in July 1993, resulted in the loss of Sukhumi and the rest of Abkhazia. With all due respect to the heroic efforts of the Abkhaz militias and their supporters, their two most important military successes (taking Gagra and Sukhumi) only occurred after Shevardnadze had put his trust in Russian guarantees and ordered the withdrawal of most of the Georgian forces from those cities.

It would be unfair to put all the blame on Shevardnadze personally. The belief that the war was really a war with Russia was shared by the great majority of Georgians, who were also mesmerized by Russian military power, imagining it to be infinitely superior to their own. What was called a Georgian army was really a bunch of self-ruled (that is, quite unruly) poetically named "battalions" comprising both romantic patriots and thugs, whose activities were only loosely coordinated, and which were sometimes capable of heroic deeds but would not carry out orders they did not like. Their continuous abuse of civilians (and not only Abkhaz) alienated the local population (Georgian included) and significantly reduced any international support Georgia might otherwise have had. But many post-communist wars are fought by spontaneously created militias, they are never nice and noble, and some parties are still victorious. As in most wars (the Russian-Chechen war is the best example), losing the war depends on losing your nerve. He who blinks first loses. In this war, it was the Georgians who were the first to lose their nerve.

Though the Abkhaz side was objectively in a more difficult position, especially at the beginning of the war, it did not blink. Although its role is often overestimated by the Georgian side, Russian military support did count for a great deal, but it would not have been enough on its own. The Abkhaz saw their very existence as a nation at stake, and that became a basis for enormous consolidation. Most neutral observers with whom I have had a chance to talk agreed that the military detachments fighting on the Abkhaz side were much more organized and combat-ready than the Georgian ones. However paradoxical it may sound, even the Russian military seemed to be more motivated when they fought for the Abkhaz than when they fought in Chechnya.

Something should be added here on the public attitude to the war. Unlike the situation in the Russo-Chechen war – when a substantial part of the Russian public did not support the war and after the defeat would probably agree to getting rid of Chechnya altogether – for the Georgian public fighting a war to retain Abkhazia as part of Georgia was clearly a legitimate exercise in itself, and efforts to regain Abkhazia continue to be an important item on the national political agenda. This difference may be explained by the fact that popular attachment to Chechnya as

Russian territory is not much – if at all – stronger in Russia than was the attachment to Estonia or Georgia ("if we gave up Estonia and Georgia, why can we not give up Chechnya?"), whereas the Georgian public regarded Abkhazia as an "inalienable" part of Georgia for which it would only be natural to fight. Few liberal-pacifist voices were audible.

The only significant opposition to war came from the supporters of the ousted President Gamsakhurdia, for whom Shevardnadze was a Russian agent and the war a Russian provocation aimed at taking Abkhazia away from Georgia (the results of the war quite reassured them in their belief). These same people, though, ardently supported the war and later opposed the peace in South Ossetia (because the war was started under Gamsakhurdia and stopped by Shevardnadze), and would probably have endorsed a military operation in Abkhazia if it had been Gamsakhurdia's idea.

While the legitimacy of the war in principle was very rarely questioned, its *expediency* was, especially down the road and, naturally, after the defeat: yes, in principle it was right to fight the war for what it considered to be a inalienable part of Georgia, but was it necessary? Was it not a miscalculation? Most people now believe it was a mistake, but this was not so at the outset.

Whether people actually wanted to go to war and fight is a different matter altogether. As I said, most of the ethnic Georgian population of Abkhazia supported Gamsakhurdia and thus did not believe in the war. This led to the paradoxical situation where those Georgians for whom most was at stake and who had to fight for their own homes (and actually lost everything as a result of the war) did not want to fight at all. Here, Gamsakhurdia's propaganda worked too: as many refugees later testified, he sent a message that, following his agreement with Ardzinba, his supporters would not be touched. To the majority of those people who did fight, the territorial integrity of Georgia was a matter more of political principle than personal interest. But, because of the anti-political mood described above, moral obligations imposed by nationalism did not translate into the specific duty of military service. Many young Georgians were responding to a romantic patriotic urge in going to war in the first place, but they considered that whether to go and stay was a matter of personal choice rather than obligation. In practice, loyalty to their friends and particular commanders mattered much more than abstract patriotic duty. An attempt to build military detachments through a regular draft brought almost no success. Moreover, the ambiguous and half-hearted attitude of the Georgian government itself (which I tried to explain above) did little to boost patriotic enthusiasm. Many fighters questioned: is this war real? Does our government really want us to win it? (This was often reported by the Georgian media, and I was involved in such conversations myself.)

I have much less information to enable me to judge about the Abkhaz side, but it seems that the level of consolidation in Abkhaz society precluded any discussion on the legitimacy of the war. Ardzinba's leadership portrayed it as a war for the physical survival of the Abkhaz nation, which ruled out any chance of taking an ambiguous stand. It is widely known that at the beginning of it, however, ethnic Georgian and Abkhaz communities living in the same or adjacent villages made a kind of "separate pact": this war was started by politicians who have disagreements with each other, they said, but we have lived peacefully together for a long time and we should not take part in it. As the war continued, though, and mutual atrocities or rumours of atrocities increased, these kinds of pacts fell apart. A large number of Abkhaz left (mostly for Russia), but one can only guess as to whether they simply fled for their lives or whether a disagreement with Ardzinba's radicalism was involved (I am not familiar with any attempts to research this).

The main *result of the war* was not just the fact that the Georgian army was defeated and driven out of Abkhazia. The dramatic change in the ethno-demographic balance was an even more important outcome. Although a very small number of Georgians stayed behind (mostly Gamsakhurdia's supporters), this was a politically insignificant amount. More than two hundred

thousand Georgians were driven out. Statistics on both sides are quite unreliable and it is not completely clear whether the ethnic Abkhaz are now a majority in Abkhazia or not, but the ethnic element that was considered to be the most dangerous is not there any more (except in the Gali district in the south, but this area is quite isolated from the rest of Abkhazia).

Russian Involvement

This is perhaps the most controversial aspect of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Obviously, careful analysis should find a middle ground between the extremes of explaining away all the problems of the Caucasus by a malevolent Russian conspiracy, and saying that the Russian impact on South Caucasian matters was only marginal, or even stabilizing. But where exactly does this middle ground lie?

One can say for sure that Russia has been, and still is, the Abkhaz' most important (though not necessarily most reliable) ally in this conflict. Although the Abkhaz may be far from happy with Russia's behaviour at particular times, they do not have any other politically important ally to turn to. So, even after the CIS agreed in March 1997 to change the mandate of the Russian (formally CIS) peace-keepers in the conflict zone, contrary to Abkhaz demands (this could obviously not have been done without Russian consent), Ardzinba still had to reiterate that he accepted Russia as the chief peace-keeper and agreed that Russia should continue its mission (presumably, within the old mandate).

The real question is, what are the Russian motives and what kind of support do they have. I will begin by repeating a now almost commonplace phrase, that Russia has no coherent policy in the Caucasus.[17] In part, this is due to the fact that there is no single centre in the Russian government that could define Russian policy in this region (as it is often said, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence have different agendas, while economic interest groups such as those represented by people like Chernomyrdin or Berezovski have other interests again, etc.).[18] On the other hand, it must be admitted that Russia faces objective difficulties and challenges in the region which in fact account for its controversial and contradictory policy there.

Where there is no coherent and rational policy, however, instinct takes over, and instinctual behaviour may be quite consistent in its own way. In relation to the Caucasus, the Russian instinct was to retain as much power and influence as possible and the military presence was believed to be the major means of doing this. It was correctly assumed by Russian strategists that, if Russia's southern neighbours – Georgia and Azerbaijan – were allowed to have their own way, they would try and conduct an independent foreign policy and look for alternative partners and alliances rather than choosing an exclusive partnership with Russia. Georgia usually looks to the West, while Azerbaijan saw its independence as a chance to establish a close partnership with

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17 This is usually admitted by most Russian scholars. See, for instance, Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Security Interests and Policies in the Caucasus Region", in: Bruno Coppieters (ed.) *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels, VUBPRESS, 1996, pp. 91-102.

18 "Indeed, at the beginning of 1997 there appeared to be at least six key actors in the Russian foreign policy-making process: 1. Yeltsin himself and the extensive presidential apparatus; 2. the Foreign Ministry led by Primakov; 3. Lukoil, Transneft, Gasprom and other energy conglomerates linked to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin; 4. the Defence Ministry led by Igor Rodionov; 5. the Atomic Energy Ministry led by Viktor Mikhailov; 6. the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations led by Oleg Davydov, and the Rosvooruzheniye state-owned arms exporting company which is subordinate to the ministry." Robert O. Freedman, "Russian Policy-Making and Caspian Sea Oil", *Analysis of Current Events*, vol. 9, no. 2, February 1997, p. 6. The list of agencies may vary from one expert to another (why not add, for instance, the Border Troops Department led by Gen. Nikolayev?) and their weight changes over time, but the assessment that a single foreign policy-making centre is lacking is universally shared by experts on Russia.

Turkey, but also with Western oil companies. How could Russia counter these tendencies? It was too weak and internally divided itself to become a strong point of attraction for its new neighbours ("near abroad"), or at least it did not believe in its ability to become such a magnet without some kind of military pressure. The most efficient way to maintain influence in the Caucasus appeared to be through the manipulation of ongoing conflicts there, so this became the main direction taken by its policy in the region. The only way to stop these countries from drifting away was by exacerbating their internal difficulties: being weak and divided, they would have much less real ability to resist Russian influence.

The main material expression of this influence was seen predominantly in Russia's military presence there. It is also widely known that the military were extremely influential in defining Russian policy in the "near abroad"; in the first few years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, a *de facto* division of labour was established: the Foreign Ministry would deal with the "real" abroad, while relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union would be taken care of chiefly by the Ministry of Defence. Many Russian civilian politicians, not necessarily of the extreme nationalist variety, also shared this attitude to the Caucasus.[19]

On the other hand, however, Russia had more "real", rational interests as well. The North Caucasus is part of Russia, for which maintaining stability in this region was and is a vital necessity. The Chechen problem was already there, and in 1992 there were serious fears in Russia that the Chechen precedent could have a domino effect leading to a further disintegration of the country. In this context, instability in the South Caucasus, particularly in Georgia, was not necessarily in Russia's best interests. The Abkhazian problem was legally analogous to the Chechen case, and supporting separatist tendencies in Abkhazia was not a logical thing for the Russians to do. Violence in the South Caucasus could have a spillover effect in Russia, at least in the form of a flood of refugees. There was also a contradiction between geopolitical and economic interests, which fully manifested itself in relation to the problem of Azerbaijani oil: while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to prevent Azerbaijan from extracting oil from the Caspian (through challenging the legal status of the Caspian Sea and not recognizing Azerbaijan's right to control its off-shore oil-fields), business circles politically represented by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin looked for their share in the oil business (later, shares were acquired by the Lukoil company). But in relation to the Abkhazian problem, this kind of contradiction did not play much of a role – the Abkhazian region was economically less important.

The war phase of the conflict in Abkhazia also coincided with a sharp polarization within Russian political forces between the "democrats" led by President Yeltsin and the neo-communists/nationalists ("red-brown coalition") who vehemently opposed him. The conflict in Abkhazia became one of the arenas in which these two forces came face to face. In general, Yeltsin's side tended to support Shevardnadze's government, that is, they recognized Georgia's territorial integrity, at least in principle; the communists/nationalists, in turn, openly supported the Abkhaz and issued appeals to Russia to annex Abkhazia. In his turn, throughout the war Shevardnadze emphasized the difference between "democratic" and "reactionary" Russia and used every opportunity to express his support for Yeltsin.

The line dividing "democratic" from "reactionary" Russia, however, was not as hard and fast as Shevardnadze would have liked it to be. Minister of Defence Grachev was Yeltsin's man, but by and large the Russian military sided with the Abkhaz. Obviously, good relations with his own military was much more precious to Yeltsin than the support of Shevardnadze or Georgia's territorial integrity (whatever the repercussions for Chechnya), so he would not risk his own

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19 A liberal member of the Russian Duma said in an interview with us in 1994 that the overwhelming majority of the Duma committee on relations with the CIS countries believed that Georgia should be kept weak and divided in order for Russia to dominate it. The Chairman of this committee, Konstantin Zatulin, publicly said that "Georgia should become our satellite or die".

position by restraining the military too much. And since keeping the South Caucasus under control was considered to be an important priority across the political spectrum, there was no pro-Georgian consensus within the government either. The Russian political elite did not take the Georgian state seriously, so they found it difficult to put the Abkhaz and Chechen problems on the same level: Russia, they believed, would eventually resolve the Chechen problem without much effort, so why not manipulate the Abkhaz conflict in order to restrain Georgia? They would probably not have supported open military intervention in Georgia and were not happy about their own military showing too much independence from the civilian government, but the independence-minded stance taken by Georgia, which did not even want to join the CIS, was vexing for them too. At the same time, a number of liberal politicians and intellectuals (such as Galina Starovoitova and Yelena Bonner) considered Georgia to be a "small empire" and chose to support Abkhazia on moral grounds. If Russia let Georgia go, they argued, why should not Georgia let Abkhazia go as well?

One more "objective" reason why the Russian government was reluctant to stop support to Abkhazia was the fear of alienating other North Caucasian autonomies. Paradoxically (and maybe unexpectedly for the Russian politicians themselves), the crisis in Abkhazia helped redirect the growing energy of nationalist sentiment in the North Caucasus which could otherwise have exploded in Russia's face (or so Russia feared). The leader of the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus, Musa Shanibov, openly threatened the Russian authorities that, if they supported Georgia in the war against Abkhazia, the North Caucasian republics would follow the Chechen lead and seek independence from Russia.

So, while the nationalist/communist opposition backed the Abkhaz openly and consistently, the government and their supporters in the democratic camp were much less coherent. In practice this meant that Yeltsin did little to try and keep his military in Abkhazia in check, while occasionally reiterating general political support for the "territorial integrity of Georgia". The obvious fact that both sides in the Abkhaz war (as well as all the sides in all Caucasian wars) were supplied with arms from the Russian military can be explained by the fact that the Russians wanted to keep the war going, that they could not stop the lucrative arms trade which enriched their military, that different political or military groups supported different parties, or that the Russian government could not make up its mind whom to support and changed its attitude from time to time. None of these explanations contradicts any of the others.

The Russian attitude to Abkhazia may be considered a particular instance of its attempts to use internal conflicts in its "near abroad" to its own advantage. But there were some specific reasons as well. Abkhazia was one of the most popular resort areas in the former Soviet Union, so many Russians, especially in the elite, had personal sentimental recollections of it. This made the idea of annexing Abkhazia to Russia, or at least maintaining Russian control over Abkhazia in some form, especially attractive and meaningful. Moreover, some representatives of the Russian elite – including some generals, and various Russian agencies – owned property there, which created specific economic interests. And the Russian military's personal hatred of Shevardnadze for his role in dismantling the Soviet Empire is a specific – but possibly a quite important – motive.[20]

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[20] In his interview with *Moscow News*, Sergey Leonenko, a retired officer of the Russian army who fought in Abkhazia, listed hatred of Shevardnadze as the number one reason why the Russian military (meaning regular forces deployed in Abkhazia) support the Abkhaz. He also said that the Russian military believed that by supporting the Abkhaz they were promoting Russia's national interests. When asked about specific forms of support, he said he could not say everything because there was an official order to stay neutral, but he admitted that they could always get from the Russian army a "fully detailed plan of combat operations". "The success of the Abkhaz army confirms this," he continued. "But the battle for Sukhumi will be prolonged, because the army lacks people who are capable of properly carrying out those plans. Now it is our urgent task to fill positions on the management level, predominantly at the expense of retired Russian officers." "Za Pravoye Delo?", 18 July 1993.

How decisive for the Abkhaz victory was Russian military and economic support? The answer to this question requires greater military expertise and, in any case, any assessment would be hard to verify. Since the Chechens defeated the Russians on their own, it has become more conceivable in principle that the Abkhaz could also beat the Georgians without any help, especially bearing in mind what has been said above about how disorganized the Georgian troops were and how their political leadership lacked unity and confidence. However, the help – and considerable help it was too – was there. Without claiming to give any final answer, I will just make several points:

1. The Chechens did indeed shatter the myth of the invincibility of the Russian army in the Caucasus. But during the Abkhaz war this myth was still very much alive. The very fact that Russian officers (whether retired or not) fought on the Abkhaz side, and Russian planes shelled Georgian positions and civilians (and these two facts can hardly be disputed) significantly eroded the morale of the Georgian army and convinced the political leadership that the war was unwinnable.
2. It is true that, overall, both sides fought with Russian arms, but it is also evident that the Russian military empathized with the Abkhaz rather than the Georgians. This suggests that the Abkhaz would have got preferential treatment when it came to arms supplies. In so far as arms supplies were politically dictated, Russia could supply the Georgians with enough arms to keep the war going and weaken Georgia still further, but never enough to actually win.
3. It should not be assumed that the military prowess of the Chechens may be transferred to the Abkhaz. The Chechens are a mountainous people with very strong military traditions, which is not true of the Abkhaz. The latter are largely urbanized, and a widespread involvement in the tourist industry hardly develops military skills.
4. I have already made a paradoxical assertion: that the morale of the Russian military in Abkhazia seemed to be higher, perhaps even considerably higher, than in Chechnya. Many of those Russians who actually took part in combat operations were retired officers, people with high qualifications, in contrast to the inexperienced youngsters who did not know why they were in Chechnya. Financial interest was evidently part of their motivation, but as far as one can judge from their interviews in the Russian media, idealistic considerations also played a major role. All of them believed they were fighting for Russia's national interests and were taking revenge on Shevardnadze, who had betrayed these interests (Shevardnadze was a much more obvious target of their anger than people like Dudaev or Maskhadov); while at the same time fighting together with the "oppressed" Abkhaz against "Georgian imperialism" relieved them of any imperial guilt. The logistical and material support provided by regular Russian detachments, combined with this professionalism and strong motivation, was capable of making an important difference.
5. Russian support was a great boost to Abkhaz confidence, not only during the war but also before and after it. A big question (to which, of course, we will never know the answer) is: would Ardzinba have conducted the same risky and confrontational policy before the war without the hope of Russian support? The hope that Russian nationalists and communists – who were much friendlier towards the Abkhaz, at least while in opposition – would come to power in Moscow made the Abkhaz government much less likely to accept any compromises after the war.

The Current Situation and Prospects for a Settlement

The humiliating defeat in the war – which was primarily considered to be a defeat at the hands of Russia – made Georgia dramatically change its stance in relation to its northern neighbour. Joining the CIS was now perceived by Georgians to be a symbol of capitulation, of the disinte-

gration of the national project (we can say with hindsight that this was a gross overestimation of the significance of the CIS, but symbols have always played extremely important role in Georgian politics). In return, the people expected to be rewarded for this act of capitulation by peace, stability, better living conditions and a solution to the Abkhazian problem that would be in their favour.

Initially, Georgia did benefit from this step: the Zviadist insurrection in western Georgia was swiftly and relatively painlessly defeated, and this marked a return to greater stabilization. The Russian military barely took part in the hostilities, but their show of support for Shevardnadze's government was enough to guarantee it a sweeping victory. Such a simple solution to the Zviadist problem, which had been haunting the new authorities for almost two years, looked like a miracle – and created an expectation of further miracles. Getting a chance to reverse the military defeat in Abkhazia was one of the major hopes – or illusions – of the new policy. This reversal would take the shape of a deal known informally as "bases for Abkhazia". Georgia agreed to legitimize the Russian military presence in Georgia in three forms: 1. as peace-keepers in Abkhazia; 2. as border troops on the Georgian border with Turkey; 3. in several military bases deployed in different parts of Georgia. As compensation, Georgia expected Russia to "return Abkhazia", that is, to help Georgia restore *de facto* control over the breakaway region. This provision was never written into any official agreement, of course, although the version of the agreement on Russian bases initialled by defence ministers in spring 1995 included an appendix saying that the treaty would not be valid until the restoration of Georgian jurisdiction over Abkhazia. This phrase was no longer there when Shevardnadze signed an agreement in October later the same year, but he has reiterated in public many times that recovering Georgian territorial integrity is implied in it (the treaty still has to be ratified). Nor was it spelled out in any detail just *how* the actual restoration of Georgian control would take place, but the mass return of refugees under the protection of the Russian army was assumed to be the first step. Russian Defence Minister Grachev made informal and sweeping promises in front of witnesses.[21] On several occasions there were serious expectations, shared by people close to the Georgian government, that "something" was about to start. The last diplomatic victory scored by the Georgian side was at the March 1997 CIS summit, when the area of the peacekeeping operation was extended deeper into Abkhazia, so that the conditions for the return of Georgian refugees at least to the southern part of Abkhazia could be secured. The Abkhaz leadership, however, rejected the new mandate – changed without their consent – and threatened to demand the withdrawal of the Russian troops altogether. As a result, by the end of May nothing had happened beyond consultations on how to implement the results of the CIS summit.

And nothing ever did happen. The Russian attitude continues to be ambiguous. It seems obvious that, for Russia, supporting Abkhazia was just an instrument to punish – and influence – Georgia; now that Georgia had agreed to be influenced, why not reward her by reversing this support? This is logical, but too simple. The experience of the last three years has shown that Russia is really neither willing nor able to change the situation dramatically. First, attempting to change something would involve much greater effort and risk than it would like – or could afford – to take. Second, Russia is reluctant to help Georgia resolve the Abkhaz issue because it is afraid of losing leverage. Russian politicians think – correctly – that Georgia will never agree to be in the zone of exclusive Russian geostrategic domination unless strong enough pressure is exerted at all times. Keeping the Abkhaz issue unresolved seems to be the only way of keeping Georgia more or less in check. With regard to the Abkhaz, although they have no alternative but to seek Russian help, they are not Russia's puppets either, and purely political or economic pressure would scarcely be sufficient to force them into a compromise. Since the war in Chechnya, even the most naively pro-Russian Georgian politicians understand that spilling

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21 On this, see Ghia Nodia, 'Waiting for the Russian Bear', in: *War Report*, June 1995, no. 34, pp. 39-40.

Russian blood in Abkhazia for the sake of legitimizing Russian bases in Akhalkalaki or Batumi is inconceivable (and without spilling blood, dramatic change is unlikely to be achieved). Another type of "final solution" – annexing Abkhazia to Russia – can only seem a realistic option in the imaginations of the most extreme Russian nationalists.

In short, the current situation in the Georgian-Abkhaz crisis may be characterized as an impasse of volatile stability. Both Georgia and Russia persist with futile attempts to outsmart each other in pursuing the unattainable "Abkhazia for bases" deal (a situation increasingly reminiscent of the negotiations between two crooks in a popular Russian comic novel "12 Chairs": "Money first, then chairs" – "No, chairs first, then money"). Both of them cannot have their own way, but neither can give in to the other: the Georgians are afraid that Russia will lift all restrictions on Abkhazia and become openly pro-Abkhaz, which will make the Abkhaz even less inclined to compromise, while Russia is afraid that Georgia will start to oppose the Russian military presence openly. Georgia occasionally makes noises about the military option for solving the Abkhaz issue being open, but is not really trying to create a viable army, and would hate to be involved in another uncertain adventure. Every time the mandate of the Russian peace-keepers is extended (which happens twice a year), this heightens the pressure and kicks off a new round of fruitless negotiations. The Abkhaz have no option but to wait, worry about a possible Russo-Georgian deal at their expense and try to enjoy their *de facto* independence in the meantime. Nobody is happy, but nobody is terribly unhappy either, and life goes on – Georgia builds an oil pipeline from the Caspian, the Abkhaz have elections and state holidays, Russia signs partnership agreements with NATO, and things could continue in this way for a long time (the "Cyprus model" is a popular phrase when talking about the Abkhazian situation). Any resolute attempt by either of the parties to change the situation dramatically in its favour could undermine the existing – if fragile – balance and boomerang on the initiator, so everybody is cautious. The only people who are really unhappy are the refugees, but as we know from the Middle East and many other places, refugees may have to wait.

What could be the way out of the impasse? What kind of change can one think of that would be profound enough? To list some feasible options:

1. *Dramatic change in the Russian position*. Russia may accept the reality that there is no way of keeping Georgia and Azerbaijan within the area of exclusive Russian domination. Insisting on keeping Russian border guards on the Georgian-Turkish border and military bases elsewhere is an unreasonable waste of economic resources and political capital – both of which are in rather short supply. The pending reform of the Russian army requires a focusing of resources, which is hardly compatible with paying the Armenians and Georgians who comprise the bulk of the notionally "Russian" military personnel in the South Caucasus. The popular Russian argument that, were it not for Russian military involvement, the South Caucasus would be in constant turmoil, thus undermining the stability of the North Caucasus, might have seemed plausible in 1992-93, but it is no longer. Georgia and Azerbaijan are unlikely to become Russia's open adversaries and try to undermine this stability: they have enough common interests even now, and if the Russian economy starts to pick up it will become an extremely strong magnet for the South Caucasus. So far, the policy based on military pressure not only did not help Russia to achieve its objectives, but was counterproductive: Abkhazia is the best example of how Russia cut itself off from the South Caucasus economically. If Russia needs stability in the South Caucasus – an item on the list of her national interests which deserves only respect – then increasing Western involvement in the region has a stabilizing effect, and its expansion can only be welcome. If I were a Russian political strategist, I would advise President Yeltsin to start the programme for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the South Caucasus, starting with Georgia (the Armenians genuinely want the Russian troops to stay, so that is a different issue). I would say that this would make

Georgia much friendlier towards Russia overnight and eventually even increase Russian political and – even more so – economic influence. The military would not be happy, true, but the majority of the Russian public would support this idea.

Is this realistic? I believe what I say is rational from the position of Russian national interests. I am not Hegelian enough, though, to believe that whatever is reasonable will necessarily become real, and Russians themselves love to say that reason does not always apply to them ("You cannot understand Russia by reason" – this phrase by the Russian poet Tiuchev is quoted all the time). But I can claim that this is conceivable in principle, especially if, when Russian foreign policy objectives are being defined, greater weight is given to economic considerations. What would be the repercussions of this change for the Georgian-Abkhazian problem? I will leave this question open for the moment, saying only that the Georgians and Abkhaz do not appear to have even considered this option. Both have been used to living within the Russian political universe for too long, so it is hard even to imagine how any decisions could be made that are not directly imposed by the powerful third party. But I think it makes a great deal of sense for both the Abkhaz and the Georgians to take this option seriously.

2. *Closer involvement by the West and international organizations*. Shevardnadze's strategy has always been to attract as much Western involvement as possible in the attempt to find an Abkhaz settlement. The Abkhaz have been very suspicious of this, because the West recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia and because their major allies were anti-Western Russians, but this does not mean that the Abkhaz are basically ill-disposed towards the West. Georgia's main motivation for getting the West and international organizations (it never really distinguished between the two) more closely involved was to counterbalance the exclusive Russian influence, and in this regard its efforts are of course understandable and legitimate. So far, its success has been very limited. The UN Security Council refused to grant the CIS (in fact Russian) peace-keepers UN status, but otherwise accepted the exclusive Russian participation in the peace-keeping operation, with the function of the UN military observers (UNOMIG) being reduced to monitoring the situation and reporting back to UN headquarters. Otherwise, Western involvement is confined to the humanitarian level. Nothing remotely reminiscent of NATO's role in the former Yugoslavia has been seen here, nor is it expected in the future.[22]

   The Georgian leadership occasionally expresses the hope that, once the West is less busy with the former Yugoslavia, it will devote more attention and resources to solving problems in the Caucasus. I think that first, this is unrealistic, and second, the West's ability to solve these kinds of problems is also greatly overestimated. Russia is hardly objective and may be pernicious, but at least it has real interests in the region and can be ruthless enough to enforce its will if it is ready and able to do so (it is often observed that the Russian language does not distinguish between peace-keeping and peace-making – the literal translation of the word most often used, *mirotvorchestvo*, is "peace-making"). Western countries, and especially the highly bureaucratized international organizations through which they usually prefer to work, do not apply real pressure unless there is a particular, and strong, interest or demonstrable threat to international security involved. Provided there is neither war in Abkhazia nor an immediate danger of its renewal, no decisive measures are imminent. The extraction and transportation of Caspian oil is currently the only issue that makes the Caucasus interesting to the rest of the world, but Abkhazia is not on any real or even projected pipeline routes.[23] Abkhazia's geographic position makes it vitally important for Russia's relations with Georgia

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22 For more on this, see: S. Neil MacFarlane, Larry Minear, and Stephen D. Schenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Occasional Paper no. 21, 1996.

and with the South Caucasus in general, but only an actual renewal of war would make it significant for the West.

This is not to say that Western participation may not be valuable. Contacts with Westerners help both Georgians and Abkhaz understand what modern political thinking is about and shake off the illusions that are distracting them from their search for realistic solutions. Western interest in the region may be slight, but the Western interest in peace, at least, may be more genuine, so if the parties choose to reach a compromise they would have a better chance of doing so with Western mediation. But this last option would require a profound change in the attitudes of the parties directly involved in the conflict. The illusion that the West may one day come and impose a "fair" solution (whatever the definition of "fair" may be) can only postpone this change of attitude.

3. *Changes in Georgia and Abkhazia*. As I have tried to show in the previous sections, both the fact that the war happened, and its military outcome, were caused predominantly by internal Georgian turmoil. What influence can the change from turmoil to stability in Georgia proper have on prospects for a settlement in Abkhazia? One of the possible strategies of the Georgian political elite (which is rarely expressed in the form of a coherent doctrine but appears to be gaining influence nonetheless) is that, once Georgia picks up economically (and in 1996 its economic growth rate was already the highest in the CIS), and the situation in politically and economically isolated Abkhazia deteriorates, the Abkhaz will be more likely to seek a compromise. The Abkhaz will see more sense in being united with Georgia than in being dragged, kicking and screaming, into some form of federation. In the meantime, recollections of the cruelty of war will fade, making the reconciliation psychologically more possible.

   I think this approach has many rational aspects to it. But there is a risk of overestimating economic factors here. The Abkhaz attempt to separate from Georgia was not primarily dictated by economic considerations, and economic rationality on its own cannot reverse it. It is hard to imagine, realistically, the level of disorder and impoverishment of the Abkhaz society that would be needed to induce it to accept serious compromises. The so-called economic blockade was never really enforced by Russia, and presumably there will always be some influential forces there to help Abkhazia survive (the smallness of Abkhazia makes it easy). Abkhazian land is good enough to prevent real starvation. As I said, traditions of militancy are not as strong in Abkhaz as in Chechen society, a fact which, after the war, is purely positive: there are probably fewer chances of public order being disrupted by clashes between warlords. So far, at least, nothing serious has happened. Under these conditions, isolation and external pressure alone may merely help Abkhaz society continue to consolidate itself around a more radical stance, rather than increasing its propensity to compromise.

   Stabilization and growth in Georgia may give rise to a different tendency as well. Georgia could take the time to build up a strong army and prepare for a military *revanche*: an option sometimes referred to as the "Croatian scenario". This trend would be quite logical and should not be discounted. As I said, the majority of Georgians regard the country's territorial integrity as a legitimate cause in which to apply military force. It is still widely believed that, at the end of the day, the conflict will be solved by military means. The current political situation makes it possible to create a more regular and disciplined army. Provided that Chechnya seeks closer contacts with Georgia – and many Chechen leaders denounced

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23 After this paper was written, the idea emerged of putting Abkhazia on the map of oil pipeline networks – an issue presumably discussed during the meeting between Ardzinba and Shevardnadze in August 1997 in Tbilisi. This appears to be based on the notion that there should be economic incentives for co-opting Abkhazia, rather than on any economic rationale for the project itself. It therefore has probably even slimmer chances of materializing than another idea for a "peace pipeline" – the one running through mountainous Karabagh.

Chechen participation in the war against Georgia[24] – the level of military support from the North Caucasians may be reduced. It seems likely that the Russians have learned their lesson in Chechnya and will not help the Abkhaz again. The Georgian minister for security, Shota Kviraia, stated in the spring of 1997 that his agencies' troops could only regain Abkhazia militarily.[25] This may not be true (how is it possible to check without actually trying?), but it indicates that militancy on the Georgian side may be growing. So is pressure from the refugee community. Every now and then rumours spread of a coming eruption of hostilities.[26]

So the military option is there and the likelihood of Georgia's using it may increase. At the moment, however, I do not think that this likelihood is as great as it sometimes seems. The military coup is still a recent memory in Georgia, and Shevardnadze does not appear to be making a priority out of building a strong army. Keeping his minister of defence, Vardiko Nadibaidze, politically weak and isolated is a sign of that: nobody believes that this man can build a viable army, nor is he politically dangerous to anybody in his own country (least of all the Abkhaz, probably). Countries preparing for war do not act in this way. With the economic turnaround yet to prove its sustainability, most of the Georgian political or economic elite would hate to gamble with Georgia's future. The behaviour of Russia and its military in the event of a fresh outbreak of conflict is unpredictable. The current, much more pragmatic political elite would start a war only if it were a safe bet. The general public, which has not reconciled itself to having lost Abkhazia, would probably accept a military solution in principle, but nobody actually wants to fight in person. The period of military enthusiasm is over, and it has been discredited by the (disgracefully) lost war.

4. *New Georgian-Abkhaz Dialogue*? Since summer 1996, direct dialogue between the Georgians and Abkhaz, until then virtually non-existent, seems to be intensifying. Several meetings on a non-governmental level have taken place, and politicians are showing greater interest in having direct contact, without Moscow's supervision. In October 1996, a confidential visit by the Abkhaz foreign minister, Ozgan, to Tbilisi became known to the media the next day and made headlines, while in January, Georgian foreign minister Menagharishvili reciprocated by visiting Abkhazia. Not that anything important was achieved, but the tendency in itself is worth noting. I can offer no explanation for this other than that both sides are pinning fewer hopes on Russia and hence see more sense in talking to each other. Negotiations took place earlier too, of course, but that was only a politically correct ritual (both sides wanted to present themselves as properly peace-loving), while what mattered was persuading Russia to take the "right" position. Whatever the turning-point may have been (Georgia has had a series of disappointments, the Abkhaz may have been counting on a Communist victory in the Russian elections), now neither the Abkhaz nor the Georgians are sure that they can reach their ends through Russia alone. Russia of course continues to be an important player, but at least the possibility of finding a common language should be checked out.

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24 According to the interview with the Georgian MP Valeri Giorgobiani, even Shamil Basaev, the commander of the Chechen fighters in Abkhazia, says that his participation in the war was a mistake and they were deceived into it by Russia: "Kartvelebi tsin tsadit da chechnebi mogqvebit ukan, – atsxadebs shamil basaevi" ("'Georgians, lead the way and we Chechens will follow you,' says Shamil Basayev"), *Akhali Taoba*, 6 January 1997.

25 *Georgian Chronicle*, March 1997.

26 As recently as in April 1997, Radio Liberty expert on the Caucasus Liz Fuller was writing that "Politicians and political commentators in both Russia and Georgia predict that fighting between Georgia's central government and its breakaway Black Sea region of Abkhazia may soon break out again". Liz Fuller, 'Is Russia's Peacekeeping Force in Abkhazia a New Casus Belli?', *RFE/RL Newsline*, vol. 1, no. 21, 29 April 1997.

Viacheslav A. Chirikba

The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict: In Search for Ways out

> *"The principle of the free self-determination of nations [is one] upon which all the modern world insists (...) It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak".*
>
> *Woodrow Wilson*

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the appearance on the map of Europe of dozens of new states marked a transition in world history: from a bipolar world, dominated by two superpowers, to a completely new situation characterized by a substantial increase in the importance of internal and regional issues, including regional conflicts. In Western Europe, the fast-growing integration of national structures into a pan-European megastructure is leading to the erosion of classical notions of the state, including such sacred cows as state borders and state sovereignty.

But old notions, which reflect the preceding Cold War era or even more archaic periods of history, still dominate major international organizations, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe included. Arguably, any true reform of the United Nations, now much spoken about, should not be confined to fighting its bureaucracy and ineffectiveness, but – even more importantly – should get this major international organization to face the burning regional issues that are now to the fore in the making of the world's history. The UN should defend not only the interests of recognized governments, but also those of the peoples ruled, and sometimes oppressed, by these governments – it should become more an organization for peoples than for nations. Ethnic minorities should have their own place in UN structures, so that their voices are heard when important decisions or resolutions that directly affect their interests are being adopted. It is only because of the UN and OSCE's insensitivity to the plight of ethnic minorities that many of these see no other way out than to resort to violence in order to assert their rights and defend their interests.

It could be argued that a more principled approach by the United Nations to the conflict situations emerging in different parts of the world could, in many cases, help to overcome any deepening of these crises. Taking Georgia and Abkhazia as an example, one can ask whether it was normal that a country like the newly born Republic of Georgia should have been admitted to the UN in conditions of unresolved ethnic conflicts and civil war, simply because an allegedly pro-democracy leader came to rule the country after the democratically elected president had been deposed by a military coup. Was it normal that when in August 1992 this same leader, a short time after Georgia was granted UN membership, started a major military campaign against the small Abkhazian republic that was seeking more autonomy; when there were numerous reports of bloodshed and abuses of basic human rights; when, in a televised address, the commander of the Georgian forces in Abkhazia explicitly threatened the entire Abkhazian

population with genocide;[1] when the monuments to Abkhazian culture were being desecrated and the National Archives and scientific establishments of Abkhazia were being burnt to ashes; when there were numerous appeals to the United Nations by the Abkhaz authorities and different international organizations and NGOs to intervene and help to stop violence – that, despite all this, there was no response whatsoever from the United Nations? But when Georgia began to lose ground in Abkhazia and, sensing imminent defeat, appealed to the United Nations to help preserve its "territorial integrity", it immediately got a positive reaction. Is it normal that the United Nations resolutions should invariably use pejorative language towards Abkhazians and their elected authorities and, paradoxically, should treat Abkhazia as a culprit and the Tbilisi government, which started and waged the war, as a victim? And such an attitude is characteristic not only of UN. In one of its resolutions, the European Parliament called the Abkhazian Government a "bandit-terrorist movement".[2] This and many other instances clearly demonstrate the exclusively pro-government – whatever the government – attitude of major international structures, and their utter insensitivity to the voices of anyone other than recognized governments. It is this (in my view) outdated approach that needs to be reformed.

Self-Determination

All the UN Security Council resolutions on Georgia/Abkhazia – notorious for their one-sided pro-Georgian stance and harsh language towards Abkhazia – while ritualistically repeating the demand for respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Georgia, leave out one very important element. Not a single word in these resolutions addresses the concerns of the Abkhazian side of the conflict or the legitimate and inalienable right of the Abkhazian people to self-determination.

The right to self-determination remains a burning issue for the international community, and one which the United Nations and OSCE are failing – or rather, are unwilling – to address properly. Though this principle is enshrined in the United Nations Charter (in Article 1), priority is in fact given to the concurring principle of territorial integrity and the inviolability of state borders. The history of the last decade, with the sudden and unexpected disintegration of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, as well as the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia, has showed that today this principle has only relative validity, and should be applied more to forced changes of the borders of one state by another state or states than to the emergence of two or more new states from an older one.

A number of important points emerge from this. First, whatever the apocalyptic predictions may be, the separation of part of a state does not necessarily lead to the annihilation of that state. It should be noted that despite the de facto separation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, populated by

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1 The Commander-in-Chief of the Georgian forces in Abkhazia, Colonel Giorgi Karkarashvili, in an address to the population of Abkhazia broadcast on Sukhum television on 25 August 1992, warned that "Even if the total number of Georgians – 100,000 – are killed, then from your [Abkhazian] side all 97,000 will be killed", and he advised the Abkhazian leader V. Ardzinba "not to act in such a way that the Abkhazian nation is left without descendants" (cf. G. Amkuab, T. Illarionova, *Abxazija: Xronika neobjavlennoj vojny*. Chast' I. 14 avgusta – 14 sentiabria 1992 goda. Moskva, 1992, p. 128). 97,000 was the approximate number of the entire Abkhazian population of Abkhazia. Soon after this event Karkarashvili was promoted by Shevardnadze to the rank of general, and later replaced Kitovani as Georgian Minister of Defence. In an interview given in the occupied city of Sukhum, another high-ranking Georgian official, the Minister of State for Abkhazia, Goga Khaindrava, told the correspondent from *Le Monde Diplomatique* (published in April 1993) that "there are only 80,000 Abkhazians, which means that we can easily and completely destroy the genetic stock of their nation by killing 15,000 of their youth. And we are perfectly capable of doing this."

2 "Abkhazi [sic!] terrorist-separatist movement", in point B of the "Resolution on the situation in Georgia" (B3-1452, 1474, 1490, 1505 and 1516/93, November 1993).

distinctly non-Georgian and independently minded nations, Georgia managed to acquire its much-needed internal coherence and enjoy the first years of a dynamic and relatively peaceful development. Secondly, it is sometimes more expedient to release part of a country and let it form an autonomy (as in the case of Gagauzia in Moldova), or even a separate state, than to engage in a bloody, costly and inhuman war trying to hold on at any cost to the independence-seeking territory, which is usually populated by a non-related people. Some analysts rightly call this latter phenomenon "aggressive integrationalism", a description that fully applies to such a state as Georgia and to some other multi-ethnic states which, in the course of their history, incorporated or annexed territories and their indigenous populations. As noted by Gidon Gotlieb in his book *Nation Against State*, "The denial of statehood to the peoples who have engaged in a long and painful struggle or who continue to resist alien rule is increasingly difficult to justify even as the imperative of limiting the number of new states is becoming more pressing".[3]

While informally discussing these problems with high-ranking UN officials, the Abkhazian delegation in Geneva was reminded that much bloodshed in world history had been caused by the striving for self-determination. At least two contrary arguments can be put forward against this claim, typical of the current UN attitude towards the issue of self-determination.

First, the overwhelming majority of the present UN member states came into existence precisely through asserting their right to self-determination, often by way of military struggle, the best-known example being the United States of America. In more recent times, the fifteen newly recognized states of the former Soviet Union and the former union republics of Yugoslavia, as well as Slovakia and Eritrea, emerged as independent states and were recognized by the international community through realizing their right to self-determination, by separating from other states and by changing internationally recognized borders. Incidentally, most of these examples show that, as such, the realization of the right to self-determination does not necessarily lead to violence and bloodshed, and that the "divorce" can be arranged in a peaceful and civilized manner.

Second, in justifying military action by the need to preserve a country's territorial integrity, aggressive integrationalism can lead to no less violence and bloodshed than is usually ascribed to the striving for self-determination. Examples of this abound, but the closest to my theme are the bloody wars waged by Georgia against South Ossetia and Abkhazia and by Russia against Chechnya.

In discussing the different forms of self-determination, I would like to put special emphasis on the cases where the competing principles of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination can – though this may sound paradoxical – coexist peacefully. This can happen when a distinct territory is content to limit its claims to internal self-determination, which means the creation of a smaller state that maintains its internal sovereignty, or internal independence, without breaking away from the bigger state within whose borders it is confined. And this is exactly the case of Abkhazia and Georgia. One could discuss at length how to name such a complex state: a confederation, a loose federation, or associated territories. Whatever the name, what is really important here is that peace is being preserved between the different ethnic components of a bigger state, that the borders are not violated, and the population of all parts of the formerly unitary state can fully enjoy the privilege of peace.

Similar federalization processes are taking place in our day in parallel with the more visible integration of Europe. We see the federalization of Belgium and the creation of separate Flemish and Wallonian parliaments, we observe the process of the devolution of power in Great Britain and the setting up of Scottish and Welsh parliaments, as well as the campaign for federalization

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3 G. Gotlieb, *Nation Against State. A New Approach to Ethnic Conflicts and the Decline of Sovereignty*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993, pp. 19-20.

in Italy. Contrary to fears that such measures might undermine a country's stability, one can argue that the reverse may be true: they can actually lead to a strengthening of the country in question, as they allow it to avert the danger of a destructive explosion caused by the long-suppressed dissatisfaction of ethnic minorities or distinct territories.

Devolution of central power, shared responsibility, shared sovereignty, internal self-determination, internal sovereignty, internal self-government by smaller nations within bigger states – all these issues, when properly addressed, present a promising perspective for many countries that have, for decades, been vainly fighting the spectre of "separatism" at a cost of huge financial, military and human resources. Such solutions can, arguably, serve not as a destabilizing, but, on the contrary, as a stabilizing factor for the state in question, as they allow it to achieve a vitally important internal coherence between its ethnically heterogeneous components.

The Validity of Abkhazian Claims to Statehood

Before describing the situation with the Georgian-Abkhazian peace process, I would like to say a few words about Abkhazians and their country simply in order to make it clear that the Abkhazian people have legitimate grounds for their claims to statehood and sovereignty. Abkhazians speak a language unrelated to Georgian. They have their own distinct culture and history. Abkhazians have never been, have never regarded themselves, and have never been regarded by Georgians or, for that matter, by any other people, as part of the Georgian nation. Apart from short intervals, they have always enjoyed independent statehood or very high levels of political autonomy.

The Abkhazians living in Abkhazia are predominantly (Orthodox) Christians (some 60%) or Sunni Moslem (some 40%).[4] The majority of Moslem Abkhazians were deported by the Russian Tsarist administration to the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century as a punishment for their fierce resistance to the Russian occupation and colonization of Abkhazia.[5] This explains, on the one hand, the existence of quite a sizeable Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey

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[4] No precise figures exist on the relative proportions of Christians, Moslems or atheists among Abkhazians living in Abkhazia. One may suppose that the proportion of Christians among the religious Abkhazians must reach 60%. My personal observations indicate that the number of believers among Abkhazian intellectuals has increased since the war of 1992-1993. All Abkhazian Moslems belong to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, while Christians are Russian or (more rarely) Eastern Orthodox. The role of the Abkhazian language in church ceremonies has increased in recent times. The major Christian texts have been translated into Abkhazian since the middle of the 19th century. There is no antagonism whatsoever between Christian and Moslem Abkhazians and mixed marriages are very common. Abkhazia has never known any form of religious fanaticism, Abkhazians are very tolerant of other faiths, and, in all fairness, tend to be quite indifferent to matters of religion. Christian Abkhazians in general are not diligent churchgoers, and until recently those who regard themselves as Moslems have not had a single mosque to attend in Abkhazia. As rightly observed by many authors, the plain truth is that neither Christianity nor Islam forms more than a surface laid over the old Abkhazian paganism. Diaspora Abkhazians, on the contrary, are Moslems in the true sense of the word, although they are not renowned for any fanaticism either.

[5] The pre-emigration figure for Abkhazians was between 130,000 and 150,000, and for Abkhazo-Abazas about 180,000 (cf. V.A. Chirikba, *Common West Caucasian. The Reconstruction of its Phonological System and Parts of its Lexicon and Morphology*. Leiden: CNWS Publications, 1996, pp. 1-3). In 1897 the first official all-Russia census established the presence in Abkhazia of 58,697 Abkhazians, which comprised 55.3% of Abkhazia's 106,000 population; the figures for other ethnic groups in Abkhazia were: 25,875 Georgians (24.4%; these were mainly Megrelians), 6,552 Armenians (6.1%), 5,135 Russians (5.6%) and 5,393 Greeks (5.0%) (cf. S.Z. Lakoba (ed.), *Istorija Abkhazii. Uchebnoe posobie*, Gudauta: Alashara, 1993, p. 347).

and some Middle Eastern countries[6] and, on the other, the fact that Abkhazians now represent only a minority in their own homeland.[7]

Contrary to the claim that Abkhazia has always been a part of Georgia, the real historical situation was quite different, because from the 13th century until 1918 Georgia as a single state simply did not exist. In the 8th century, Abkhazians created the Abkhazian Kingdom, which united in the 10th century with several Georgian kingdoms to form a united Abkhazian-Georgian Kingdom. In the 13th century this united kingdom was destroyed by the Mongol invasion, and from that time up until 1810 Abkhazia was always an independent principality, while Georgia disintegrated into a number of different principalities and "kingdoms", which in the 19th century were incorporated, one after another, into the Russian Empire. In 1810 the Abkhazian Principality, independently of Georgian lands, joined Russia. Even within Russia, the Abkhazian Principality under the Princes Chachba managed to maintain its political autonomy until 1864, at a time when all Georgian lands were reduced to mere provinces of the Russian Empire.

One often hears that autonomous status was granted to Abkhazia by the Bolsheviks, ostensibly in a plot to undermine Georgia's sovereignty. Again, the real situation was quite different. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Abkhazia remained independent from Georgia. On 8 November 1917 the Congress of the Abkhazian People formed the Abkhazian parliament (the "Abkhazian People's Council"), which adopted a "Declaration" and "Constitution". On 11 May 1918, the Batum Peace Conference proclaimed the Mountainous Republic, which included the whole of the North Caucasus and Abkhazia. That same year, Abkhazia was occupied by the troops of neighbouring Georgia, who declared Abkhazia a part of Georgia and imprisoned members of the Abkhazian parliament, leading to protests from the command of the allied (British) forces in Transcaucasia and the Russian White Army. In 1921, Abkhazia and Georgia became Sovietized. On 31 March 1921, an independent Soviet Republic of Abkhazia was proclaimed. On 21 May 1921, the Georgian Bolshevik government officially recognized the independence of Abkhazia. But the same year, under pressure from Stalin and other influential Georgian Bolsheviks, Abkhazia was forced to conclude a union (i.e., confederative) treaty with Georgia. Abkhazia still remained a full union republic until 1931, when its status was downgraded, under Stalin's orders, from that of Union Republic to that of an Autonomous Republic within Georgia. This act of incorporation of Abkhazia into Georgia was conducted without the approval and against the will

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6 The exact number of Abkhazians in Turkey is not known, as the official Turkish data on minorities are notoriously unreliable. Some specialists speak of more than 100,000 Abkhazians (G.A. Dzidzariya, *Macha-dzhirstvo i problemy istorii Abkhazii XIX stoletija*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1982, p. 493), while other authors estimate their numbers in Turkey (together with that of the closely related Abazas) at half a million (cf. I. Marykhuba, *Abkhazija v sovetskuju epoxu. Abkhazskie pis'ma (1947-1989)*, Sbornik dokumentov. Tom 1. Akua (Sukhum), 1994; P. Overeem, "Report of a UNPO coordinated human rights mission to Abkhazia and Georgia", in: *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1995, p. 18). According to the results of my own field research in Turkey, there are no fewer than 250 Abkhaz-Abaza villages in that country (V.A. Chirikba, "Distribution of Abkhaz dialects in Turkey", in*: Proceedings of the Conference dedicated to the memory of Tevfik Esenç*, Istanbul, forthcoming). In addition, a large number of Abkhazians are now living in cities and towns, the most numerous communities being in Istanbul, Ankara, Duzce, Inegol, Bilecik, Eskishehir, Samsun and Sinop. As well as in Turkey, there are also some 5,000 Abkhazians in Syria (information from Syrian Abkhazians); still smaller Abkhazian communities are to be found in some other Middle Eastern countries. Abkhazian colonies (made up mainly of Turkish Abkhazians) exist also in many Western European countries, such as Germany (some 3,000), the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Britain, Switzerland and Austria. A small Abkhazian community in New Jersey, USA, is mostly made up of immigrants from Syria.

7 Apart from the forced emigration to Turkey, another factor responsible for the sharp decrease in the relative number of Abkhazians in Abkhazia was the (often forced) resettlement from Georgia to Abkhazia of tens of thousands of Georgians. This resettlement policy, aimed at shifting the demographic balance in Abkhazia in favour of ethnic Georgians, was successfully carried out by the Communist authorities of Georgia up to 1992, but this policy was practised on its largest scale in the 1930s and 1940s, under the rule of Stalin and Beria.

of the Abkhazian people and caused mass protests in Abkhazia. Thus the creation of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic within Georgia was not the result of the granting by the Bolsheviks of autonomous status to one of the republic's minorities, as it is often alleged, but was rather the forced convergence of two neighbouring states by the incorporation of one of them, Abkhazia, into the other, Georgia.

Another typical misunderstanding is that, by adopting certain constitutional acts in 1990-1992, the Abkhazian Republic proclaimed its independence from Georgia. In fact, Abkhazia has never officially declared its separation from Georgia. All acts undertaken by Abkhazia, beginning in 1990, were designed to protect its autonomous political status, deemed necessary in view of the numerous statements made by leading Georgian politicians that they doubted the legal character of Georgia's autonomies and even threatened to abolish all of them and transform Georgia into a unitary state.

The Act of State Sovereignty, adopted by the Abkhazian Parliament in 1990, was to protect the Republic's federal status from being ignored or eliminated by the Tbilisi government. Abkhazia adopted this act following analogous acts adopted by all the other former autonomous republics of the Soviet Union, and in none of these other cases did this mean the separation of their territory from that of the metropolis.

By reverting in 1992 to the Constitution of Abkhazian Republic of 1925, in which relations between Abkhazia and Georgia were based on a special Treaty of Union, Abkhazia was attempting to overcome a constitutional vacuum in its relations with Georgia after the abolition by the Georgian Military Council of all constitutional acts adopted in Georgia during Soviet times, and after its return to the Constitution of the Georgian Democratic Republic of 1921, in which the autonomous status of Abkhazia was not defined. By adopting its new constitution in 1994, Abkhazia broke off its last remaining ties with the old Communist regime, and declared Abkhazia a sovereign democratic state. This constitution did not specify the form its relations with Georgia should take, as these were to be defined through political talks with Georgia. Nor were the status of Abkhazia or its relations with Georgia specified in the new Georgian constitution.

The Georgian War against Abkhazia (1992-1993)

In 1991 the Soviet Union disintegrated. In May 1991, the one who became the first president of an independent Georgia was the ardent nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who actually pursued the policy of "Georgia for the Georgians". A year later, Gamsakhurdia was deposed as a result of a *coup d'état* organized by warlords and ex-criminals Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani. The former Communist boss of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, who was perceived in the West as a "democratic" politician during his service as the USSR's Foreign Minister, was invited to rule the country, although his alleged democratic credentials did not convince the Georgians or former autonomies within Georgia, who knew Shevardnadze all too well as a staunch Brezhnevite – one who, for more than 10 years, had ruled Georgia with an iron fist. As the new Georgian leadership declared all laws adopted during Soviet times null and void, the leadership of the former Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, in order to save Abkhazia's political autonomy from being overridden, proposed a draft treaty whereby Georgia would become a federative state of which Abkhazia would be a constituent republic. The Georgian answer to this initiative was to launch a major military attack on Abkhazia on 14 August 1992. The Georgian leaders announced that there would be no autonomies in the new Georgia. To that country's great humiliation, the war was lost by the undisciplined and poorly trained Georgian army. Most of Abkhazia's non-Kartvelian minorities (Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Turks, etc.) allied themselves with the Abkhazians in their struggle against the aggressors. In addition, related peoples from the

North Caucasian republics, notably Chechens, Circassians and Abazas, came to Abkhazia and fought alongside the Abkhazian forces. The war ended in late September 1993 with the decisive victory of the Abkhazian army and its North Caucasian allies.

The much speculated-about Russian military assistance to the Abkhazians should not be overestimated, as it is in practically all Georgian and many Western publications. First, there was of course no direct involvement by Russian troops in any Abkhazian operations (apart from the participation of Russian and Cossack volunteers; Georgia, in turn, was assisted by fighters from Western Ukraine). Despite allegations, nobody has yet produced any compelling evidence to prove such involvement. For example, the UNPO human rights mission that visited Tbilisi at the end of 1993 could not obtain from the Georgian side any reliable evidence to support such charges.[8] One could perhaps claim that the bombardment of Georgian positions at the Gumsta front by Russian military planes could serve as proof. But the Russians themselves made no great secret of such raids, and explained that they were provoked by the Georgian artillery shelling of the Russian military laboratory in Eshera which caused numerous casualties, including deaths, among the Russian personnel. Arguably, all warfare is a profitable business, and the war in Chechnya showed that, paradoxically, some Russian elements sold weapons to the Chechen side in order to make a profit. In the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict too, all weapons on both sides were, after all, of Russian origin.

The difference was that while Georgia was getting huge amounts of weaponry and ammunition from the former Soviet Army free (in accordance with the CIS Tashkent Agreement, and via many other, non-official, channels), Abkhazia had to buy weapons from elements of the Russian army stationed in Abkhazia and beyond. The Russian military had no scruples about selling arms to any side, although, admittedly, in general their personal sympathies lay more with the Abkhazians, who were fewer in number and therefore much more vulnerable. The selling of arms to them was regarded as a fair business, to counterbalance their numerical weakness. Besides, many weapons were coming to Abkhazia from or via North Caucasian sources and, probably, also via the diaspora.

One of the unexpected consequences of the Abkhazian victory became the mass exodus of ethnic Georgians (or rather Kartvelians, i.e., Georgians, Megrelians and Svans) from Abkhazia. During the Georgian occupation of parts of Abkhazia, many local Georgians collaborated with the troops sent by Tbilisi and, together with these troops, were responsible for acts of murder and other atrocities, as well as looting, perpetrated against their Abkhazian, Armenian and Russian neighbours. After the Abkhazian victory, fearing reprisals, the panic-stricken Kartvelian population of the republic fled en masse.

The Georgian side accuses Abkhazia of the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population of the republic. In response to these accusations the Abkhazian side has stated that the Georgian population of the territory of Abkhazia south of Sukhum fled to Georgia and elsewhere *before* the arrival of Abkhazian troops, and that it was not the policy or intention of the Abkhazian government to expel Georgians or any other ethnic group from Abkhazia.

After the Abkhazian capital Sukhum was retaken by the Abkhazian troops, as a result of fierce fighting, there were in fact no other major battles between the Abkhazian and Georgian forces because the latter, demoralized by their defeat in Sukhum and by the dynamic Abkhazian army advance, rushed in panic (often leaving their heavy weaponry behind) towards the Georgian border, or to the Svanetian mountains, in exactly the same way as had already happened earlier in Gagra. This disorderly retreat caused, in turn, great panic amongst the local Georgian civilians, who followed the fleeing Georgian soldiers en masse, with the result that when the victorious Abkhazians entered the previously occupied territory of their republic to the south of

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8 P. Overeem, op.cit., p. 138.

Sukhum, all they encountered in villages and towns were mostly deserted Georgian houses. The statement by the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, issued on 11 October 1993, read:

> The local Georgian population, which in the course of a year-long war either witnessed or participated in the brutal outrages of the Georgian soldiers against civilian Abkhazians, Armenians, Russians and Greeks (mainly old people, women and children) (...) preferred to leave Abkhazia for fear of acts of revenge.

A UN fact-finding mission was sent to Abkhazia by the Secretary-General in October 1993 to investigate human rights violations, especially the reports of ethnic cleansing. The mission was sent at the insistence of the Georgian side, and as a precondition to Georgian participation in talks in Geneva. Though in its report the mission stressed that it was not in a position to ascertain whether it had been a policy actively pursued by the authorities of either side, at any time, to clear the areas under their control of either the Abkhazian or the Georgian population, at the same time it clearly stated that most Georgians living in the region between the Gumsta and Ingur rivers had tried to flee *before* the arrival of the Abkhazian forces.[9] Incidentally, some more objective Georgian authors also prefer not to exploit the controversial term "ethnic cleansing", speaking instead in terms of the flight of the Georgians from Abkhazia.[10] However, official Tbilisi, which is trying to score points in its propaganda war against the Abkhazian Republic, continues its accusation of "the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Georgian population of Abkhazia", while at the same time disclaiming all responsibility for unleashing the war in Abkhazia in August 1992 or for the establishment of the regime of terror on the occupied territory of Abkhazia.

Peace Process

The negotiations process between Georgia and Abkhazia, which started in December 1993 in Geneva under UN auspices and with mediation by the Russian Federation, initially produced promising documents, one of the most important of which was the "Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict", signed on 4 April 1994 in Moscow. The declaration emphasized the wish of the parties to reinstate their state-legal relations and outlined the contours of a future common state. According to this declaration, the Abkhazian Republic is to have its own constitution, parliament and government, and appropriate state symbols. The document delimits the spheres of separate and shared Georgian/Abkhazian competence. Abkhazia is to delegate some of its state responsibilities – such as foreign policy and foreign economic ties, border guard arrangements, customs, energy, transport and communications, ecology, civil and human rights and the rights of ethnic minorities – to the common (federal) organs of power. All other responsibilities will remain the unique prerogative of the Abkhazian State. The declaration was signed by the parties to the conflict and the representatives of Russia, the UN and the OSCE in the presence of the Russian Foreign Minister, the UN Secretary-General and many Western ambassadors.

The relative stabilization of the situation in Abkhazia and the deployment of CIS peacekeeping troops and UN military observers on the border between Abkhazia and Georgia along the Ingur river allowed some 70,000 Georgian (mainly Megrelian) refugees to return to their homes in the Gal region of Abkhazia. These people, however, are suffering because of the destroyed economic

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9 UN Document S/26795.

10 R. Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia. Space, Society, Politics*, London: UCL Press, 1995, pp. 43, 178. According to the Georgian State Committee for Refugees and Displaced Persons, some 160,000 refugees from Abkhazia have been officially registered and accommodated in 63 districts of Georgia, cf. "The Georgian Chronicle", February-March 1994, as cited in A. Zverev, Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus. In: Bruno Coppieters (ed.). *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996, pp. 13-71.

infrastructure and large numbers of landmines, some of which are still being deployed by subversive Georgian groups.

But the political process of the peaceful reintegration of Georgia and Abkhazia, as envisaged by the Declaration of 4 April 1994, was given no follow-up, and the situation took a turn for the worse. What happened was that Georgia, after having recuperated from the blow inflicted by military defeat, began revisiting the essential provisions of the Declaration of 4 April and trying to solve the problem of Abkhazia by separate military agreements with Russia and increased political pressure on Abkhazia. During the visit by the Russian Prime Minister, Chernomyrdin, to Tbilisi in 1995, it was agreed that Russia would help to restore Georgia's rule over Abkhazia in return for five Russian military bases in Georgia for a period of 25 years. These arrangements provoked a strong protest from Abkhazia. Instead of trying to resolve its differences with Abkhazia by means of mutual accommodation, Georgia, starting from the false premises that military intimidation and an economic blockade could force Abkhazia to give up its claim to sovereignty, preferred to reappear, as in the 19th century, as a major military ally and foothold for Russia in Transcaucasia. The UN is supporting the tough stance newly adopted by Georgia, blaming Abkhazia, as usual, for the breakdown in negotiations. Russian support has brought new optimism to Georgia that the Abkhazian problem can be solved by combined Russo-Georgian military action in Abkhazia. The spectre of a new war has begun to loom over the region.[11]

The political rapprochement between Georgia and Russia has resulted in a wholesale Russian blockade of Abkhazia aimed at the strangulation of Abkhazia's civilian population. Since 1995, Russia has established a naval and land blockade of Abkhazia, closed its borders with Abkhazia and refused to recognize Abkhazian passports or to allow Abkhazian citizens to travel abroad. Since April 1997, Russia has cut off all telephone lines connecting Abkhazia with the outside world, thereby establishing an information blockade of the small republic. All this raises serious doubts regarding Russia's capacity to act as a mediator, as such a position requires neutrality and a balanced approach to both sides in the conflict.

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11 The dangerously increased tension was due to certain declarations made by Georgian leaders and to the actions carried out by the Russian military in Abkhazia. Thus, in an interview published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (29 June 1994), the Georgian leader Shevardnadze announced that the so-called "Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia", based in Tbilisi, would soon move to the Gal region. In its statement of 29 June, the Abkhazian Supreme Council characterized Shevardnadze's declaration as "provocative", and expressed deep concern about the actions of the peacekeeping force which, by permitting the uncontrolled mass return of refugees, had caused the destabilization of the situation in the region. On two occasions, around 15 May and 15 July 1995, tension in Abkhazia rose considerably owing to the statements issued by Georgian officials in Tbilisi, who called for the mass repatriation to Abkhazia of Georgian refugees. The statements made in early July by the Russian Commander of the CIS peacekeeping force, endorsing such an uncontrolled mass repatriation and promising the repatriates the protection of his forces, sparked sharp criticism from Abkhazia's officials, who declared that this could result in renewed hostilities. In the end, the much-heralded mass return of refugees was halted. In September 1995 a high-ranking Russian delegation headed by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin visited Tbilisi. On 15 September the sides concluded a number of agreements, among them one on Russian military bases in Georgia, including the base in Gudauta, and they declared their support for the principle of territorial integrity and the inviolability of existing borders, condemning "aggressive separatism and terrorism in any form" (cf. S/1995/937). The Russian-Georgian deal on military bases and the unexpected announcement that military exercises would be carried out on 30 September 1995 by the CIS peacekeeping troops, obviously designed to exert pressure on Abkhazia, prompted the Abkhazian forces to go into a state of heightened alert. It was planned to carry out the exercises in the Gal region of Abkhazia, in parallel with the introduction there of a CIS battalion consisting mainly of ethnic Georgians. Following the arrival of this battalion, it was planned that Georgian police troops would enter the region. These plans coincided with Shevardnadze's statement that the problem of the Gal region would be solved in the next few days, and that Georgian sovereignty over this region of Abkhazia would be restored (cf. the statement by the Abkhazian Parliament on 4 October 1995).

The result of separate Georgian-Russian arrangements undermining Abkhazia is that the peace talks are nearly at a standstill, and the prospects of a peaceful settlement are as remote as they were at the beginning of talks in Geneva three years ago.

Possible Ways out

Despite such negative developments, I believe that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is one of the most manageable among the conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and that there are still grounds for optimism, provided both sides can overcome sensitive psychological barriers and demonstrate enough political will to compromise. The recent history of Georgian-Abkhazian relations has shown that both parties to the conflict have insufficient strength to achieve the political goals they are pursuing: Georgia to overrun Abkhazia militarily and abolish its political autonomy, Abkhazia to gain international recognition as an independent state. This leaves the parties with room to compromise.

There are at least two crucially important positions that could lead to swift progress in the Georgian-Abkhazian peace process. First, unlike the South Ossetian autonomy, Georgia has never officially abolished the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, still regarding it as an Autonomous State. Second, unlike Chechnya in Russia, or Karabakh in Azerbaijan, Abkhazia has never officially declared its independence from Georgia. This means that both Georgia and Abkhazia still recognise, de jure and de facto, the existence of an Abkhazian State. These crucially important positions can offer quite promising prospects for an early settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. The major issue now is how exactly to accommodate the Abkhazian Republic's sovereign status, in a future state shared with Georgia, with Georgian claims to sovereignty over the whole of its territory.

The obvious diplomatic impasse in which Georgian-Abkhazian relations now find themselves could be neutralized in what I described above as internal self-determination. According to this formula, the Abkhazian Republic would remain within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia and would enjoy broad political autonomy, preserving its own constitution, parliament, government and state symbols, as well as its national army, while delegating some other important state functions, such as border control, customs, transport and communications, foreign policy, etc., to the common federative bodies: the federal parliament and government. Outside the competence of the federal institutions, both Georgia and Abkhazia would enjoy full sovereignty over their own internal affairs on the territory under the control of their own elected government bodies.

On 20 March 1996 tension between the Abkhazian authorities and the Russian border troops in Abkhazia again rose sharply. A Russian military ship, N 040, entered Sukhum Bay without permission from the Abkhazian authorities and, having arrested the Ukrainian trading ship "Vega", forced it to proceed to the nearby Russian port of Sochi. This incident, which happened during Shevardnadze's visit to Moscow, was supposedly meant as a pro-Georgian gesture. During Shevardnadze's visit Russia gave in to the Georgian demand that all foreign ships bound for Abkhazia – even those with humanitarian cargoes – would have to pass through customs in the Georgian port of Poti. In addition, it was decided that the Russians would forbid the boarding of any passengers or loading of any cargo in the port of Sukhum, which was tantamount to an almost total naval blockade of Abkhazia. In its statement of 21 March 1996, the Abkhazian Government protested against these measures, regarding them as having been taken unilaterally in the interests of Georgia and interfering in the internal affairs of Abkhazia. On 2 July 1996 an Abkhazian police post on the Gal canal was fired at with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms. At the end of September 1996, Georgia carried out military exercises in the vicinity of the conflict zone, contravening the cease-fire agreement of 14 May 1994. These and some other incidents seriously aggravated the situation and led many to think there was a real possibility of renewed hostilities.

Such a structure will only be stable and capable of bringing about lasting peace if all parts of the federation are satisfied with their level of sovereignty. This makes it necessary to create a constitutional arrangement in which Georgia, Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia enjoy equal political rights and are equally subordinated to the common federal legislative and executive structures. Within such a structure, each of the constituent republics should have a right of veto on decisions taken by the federal bodies that directly affect their vital interests. If the parties agree to make such arrangements, this will enhance their interest in common economic activity and cooperation, and will inevitably, within an estimated period of five years, lead to closer reintegration.

There are signs that at least some international structures are ready to support such a solution to the problem. Thus, recently, in its Resolution of 22 April 1997, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stressed the importance of extensive autonomy status for Abkhazia as one of the basic elements of a political settlement.[12] Any other arrangement, based on the principle of the subordination of one people to another, on the inequality of the subjects of a federation or on old Soviet-style super-centralized rule from Tbilisi, can *a priori* be regarded as futile and incapable of bringing lasting peace to this part of the former Soviet Empire.

International efforts can be instrumental in persuading the parties to reach a mutually accepted constitutional arrangement concerning the status of Abkhazia. Such concerted efforts were quite effective in achieving peace in Bosnia, and are now indispensable in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Unfortunately, in the case of Georgia and Abkhazia all pressure, including military intimidation and an inhuman economic blockade, is being put on Abkhazia. This is the wrong path to follow, as it was the UN, OSCE and individual governments' encouragement of Georgia in its uncompromising stance on political negotiations with Abkhazia that effectively brought the whole peace process to a halt.

This one-sided and mistaken approach should be radically changed. It is very important not to lose momentum and to try to revitalize the peace process now, before the current favourable situation changes and we become witnesses to another escalation of hostilities. It could be that either Georgia will start a new war against Abkhazia, or that Abkhazia, being convinced that it is futile to expect any equitable arrangement with Georgia, will declare its complete independence. These are real possibilities, which could substantially complicate the situation and diminish the chances of a comprehensive settlement.

Though the participation of Russia as facilitator is crucial for the conclusion of any lasting agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia, there is nothing to say that the group around the negotiation table should not include a new member, representing a country with no direct political or economic interests in Georgia or Abkhazia. New initiatives, fresh ideas and probably fresh personalities are needed to push the stalemated peace process forward and to achieve, as speedily as possible, political arrangements that would preclude the possibility of the oppression of the smaller nation by the bigger one, allow thousands of refugees to return to their homes in safe and dignified conditions, and lay the basis for stability and progress in this part of Europe.

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12 Resolution 233 (97), cf. www.coe.fr/cp/97/233a(97).htm.

Revaz Gachechiladze

Geographical Background to a Settlement of the Conflict in Abkhazia

Introduction

I had wished to begin the paper with the sentence: "The conflict in Abkhazia (Georgia), which reached its climax in the 1992-1993 civil war, is awaiting a settlement" but I realised immediately that the terminology might not match, since those involved in the conflict held a variety of opinions. For example, even the first line may bring a protest from a representative of the ethnic Abkhaz, who may not agree with the wording "Abkhazia (Georgia)" although it is present in all the UN Security Council resolutions on this conflict, while some would have preferred the term "the Georgian-Abkhazian war" to "the civil war in Abkhazia". However, all the wars that take place on the territory of one state between the citizens (or, at least, permanent residents) of that state are in fact civil wars, irrespective of whether they are of class origin or ideological, religious or ethnic in nature. Since 1992 the Republic of Georgia has been recognised by the international community as an independent state within the borders of the Georgian SSR and received into the United Nations, and in addition local inhabitants of the most varied nationalities (not all, it is true; and that perhaps is no bad thing) were involved (without going into whether this is good or bad) on both sides in the military action in Abkhazia.

This was the terminology used in preparing the paper: "Georgia" means the entire state within the officially recognised borders, while "the rest of Georgia" means the part of Georgia without Abkhazia. The situation that has developed in Abkhazia since 1989 is called the "conflict", the war of 1992-1993 is called "the civil war in Abkhazia", the supporters of the separation (secession) of Abkhazia from Georgia are referred to as "secessionists" while the actual leadership of the secessionists is referred to as "Sukhumi" or "the Sukhumi government", and in corresponding fashion the leadership of Georgia is referred to as "Tbilisi" or "the Tbilisi government". When I refer to the opinion of "the Abkhaz" or "the Georgians" I mean the prevailing public opinion in the corresponding ethnic groups, while freely admitting that there are quite substantial groups that do not share the predominant view.

Since there was an aim for consensus from the outset, not to create additional obstacles to constructive dialogue among the representatives of the parties by discussions on "which is the autochthonous population?" or "who started first?" and the like, I intend to give only my own opinion on the geographic (in the broad sense of the term) background to the conflict.

The fact that the conflict has created a difficult situation for both sides is beyond doubt:

the social and economic situation in Abkhazia is not improving, and the economic so-called blockade[1] by the CIS, imposed against the secessionist region is aggravating the situation. Abkhazia paid a high price for the result achieved in the civil war, in the lives of many young people and in the loss of many loyal citizens who were forced to leave the territory. The sword of Damocles of revenge makes it necessary to maintain a costly standing army: according to

[1] Actually economic sanctions imposed according to the decision of the Council of the Heads of State of CIS on 19 January, 1996 forbidding economic and other contacts with this secessionist region without the permission of the Government of Georgia. Lifting the sanctions is being linked to serious efforts to settle the conflict, primarily the return of internally displaced persons, mostly of Georgian nationality, who were driven from the region as a result of the civil war, and guaranteeing their safety.

Russian sources 72% of the budget is being spent on defence.[2] This is hardly a situation in which people would wish to live permanently;

in the rest of Georgia, which was plunged into two civil wars in 1993, being humiliated by defeat at the hands of the secessionists (this is no place for an analysis of why or how) and by forced entry into the CIS, its citizens constantly confronted by the spectre of a great mass of starving and deprived persons displaced from Abkhazia against their will, the ideas of revenge may prevail. This is not the best way to solve the problem.

The principal hypotheses in my paper are that from the economic and political-geographic viewpoints the dismemberment of Georgia (which is the actual aim of the secessionists in spite of frequent rhetoric to the contrary) is not to the advantage of the Georgians or the Abkhaz and the other nationalities living in Abkhazia, while from the cultural-geographic viewpoint there are no insuperable obstacles to finding common points of contact. The international community also has an interest in preserving the territorial integrity of a UN member and in the observance of human and ethnic minority rights. Accordingly public opinion, both in Abkhazia and in the rest of Georgia, will clearly have to get used to the idea that being in a single state – a common economic and political space – will be more beneficial to both sides in the long run than endless confrontation. However, the psychological problems in the various communities, greatly aggravated during and after the civil war, must be fully understood.

I wish to give a brief description below of the economic-geographical, cultural-geographical and political-geographical background against which the conflict developed. Of course, geography is neither the sole factor in the conflict nor a complete guarantor of a solution for it, but it may be helpful in explaining the reasons for it and, more importantly for us, in predicting particular difficulties in putting various solutions of the conflict into practice.

The Economic-Geographical Background

The geographical location of Abkhazia is extremely favourable and also predetermines its geo-political significance. Situated along the shore of the Black Sea (however, the principal ports of Georgia – Poti, Batumi and Supsa, the latter now under construction – are further south, in the rest of Georgia), Abkhazia has a definite advantage over the land-locked North Caucasus republics of the Russian Federation. After the Ubykhs and Adighean peoples, the Abkhaz' kinsfolk, who had previously occupied the Black Sea shore north-west of Gagra almost to the Sea of Azov, had been driven out by tsarism in the 1860s, the Abkhaz were left as the only autochthonous people in the Caucasus, apart from the Georgians, with access to the open sea (the Caspian is in fact a lake). This gives Abkhazia an opportunity to neutralise the CIS economic sanctions to a considerable extent. The coastal blockade by Russian warships is more symbolic than real – economic contacts, e.g. with Turkish seaports, have been practically uninterrupted: according to the Russian mass media, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that last year more than 75 ships were unloaded in the port of Sukhumi.[3]

The only railway linking the Central and Western Transcaucasus to Russia passes through Abkhazia. After it was closed due to the civil war, Abkhazia became a railway dead end and Russia was deprived of the possibility of a rail link, e.g. with its strategic partner – Armenia – and its military bases in the Transcaucasus. Restoration of this railway (which Tbilisi also links

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[2] I. Maksakov, "Vozobnovlenie voyny vozmozhno", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24 April 1997.

[3] E. Kharket, "Kontury dokumenta proyasniayutsia", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 17 June 1997.

to a settlement of the conflict) will be extremely beneficial to all sides; this includes the economy of Abkhazia.

During the Soviet era Abkhazia, with natural and climatic resources unique in the USSR, was transformed into a major recreational area and producer of crops such as citrus fruits, tea and tobacco. These goods and services were almost entirely for the vast Soviet market (and in part for COMECON markets), which were protected from outside competition and now are almost lost. It will be very difficult to restore access to these markets, to say nothing of expanding them, if the conflict remains unresolved.

Abkhazia has relatively few mineral, fuel and energy resources. It is even difficult to use the fairly numerous and free-flowing rivers for power generation, because building dams on them will reduce the load and this will adversely affect the beach equilibrium and undermine the recreational resources. For example, the construction of a hydroelectric power station on the River Bzyb will involve the destruction of Cape Pitsunda with its major resort and tourist complex. The fact that the contribution of Abkhazia to electric power generation in Georgia is substantial (over one-third) is almost entirely due to the Inguri cascade overfall generating stations in south-east Abkhazia, in the Gali district, to which water is supplied by a reservoir lying entirely within the territory of other Georgian provinces. Operation of these generating stations presupposes inevitable economic co-operation both now and in the future.

Abkhazia was not noted for industrial and agricultural products (other than tea and citrus fruit) even in terms of the Georgian SSR, which according to the Soviet yardstick had average economic potential. For example, in 1990 Abkhazia, with 12.5% of all Georgia's territory and 9.8% of its population, produced 5.8% of all industrial production and 5.1% of consumer goods. The figures for agriculture looked better: in 1985-1990 on average Abkhazia produced 12.5% of Georgia's total agricultural output. This was almost entirely due to citrus fruit (43% production on collective and state farms, but 29% from state purchases: a substantial part of the citrus fruit purchased was grown in the private sector in the rest of Georgia) and tea (20% production and 18% purchases). However, Abkhazia could not meet its own requirements for basic food crops or for most livestock products, producing 6.6% of the grain, 5.1% of the vegetables, 5.8% of the fruit (excluding citrus fruit), 0.8% of the grapes, 9.3% of the meat and 5.3% of the milk in the total Republic collective and state farm output in 1985-1990.[4]

This does not mean that Abkhazia "was very poor" and "the rest of Georgia had to support it entirely": there was actually a pattern of geographical division of labour over a certain period which will be difficult to restore under the new conditions. During the Soviet era there was no need for Abkhazia to be self-sufficient in food, because expenditure on imported foodstuffs was more than covered by the income from the more expensive products of subtropical farming and tourist services (in fact no such calculations were made, because in the USSR supply was centralised, like everything else).

Since the civil war the economic crisis has not receded. The present parlous economic state of Abkhazia is aggravated by the fact that the markets for subtropical farm products and tourist services are contracting sharply: the main reasons for this are increased competition at the international level and the economic sanctions. But even lifting the sanctions cannot fully restore the flows of tourists from Russia unless a stable peace is achieved. It is difficult to judge as yet how effective this frequently breached blockade is from the political viewpoint, but it is obvi-

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[4] Calculations based on Sakartvelos respublikis sotsialur-ekonomikuri informatsiis komiteti, *Sakartvelos regionebis sotsialur-ekonomikuri mdgomareoba*, Tbilisi, 1991

ously damaging the economy of Abkhazia and affecting the material welfare of many sections of the population.

The fact that Abkhazia can maintain an army when the economy relies mostly on subsistence farming and the sanctions theoretically prevent exports leads us to assume that there is an unofficial and very substantial flow of outside (non-humanitarian) aid which makes it possible to maintain the military potential of Abkhazia and/or that the forces that are supposed to maintain the sanctions are breaching it. In any case the situation provides no opportunity for genuine economic reforms.

Due to the substantial drop in population in Abkhazia there should be enough agricultural land to achieve self-sufficiency. If we make the theoretical assumption that the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) simply will not return to their homes, the problem will most probably be a shortage of capital and labour rather than a lack of land. But autarky can scarcely be an end in itself on the threshold of the 21st century.

For structural improvements to be made in the economy of Abkhazia, or if only for the partial restoration of the economic structure that existed there before the beginning of the 1990s, i.e. the tourist business, subtropical farming and market gardening, to say nothing of restoration of housing stock, transport and social infrastructure and the like, much greater labour resources than those left after the civil war will be required, apart from major capital investment. It is these limited labour resources that may prove to be the main complicating factor in the future economic development of Abkhazia.

The whole population has declined: according to the Sukhumi government there were "over 300,000 people" in the territory of Abkhazia by the beginning of 1997[5] compared with 535,600 in 1989.[6] The figure of "over 300,000", meaning that about 240,000 were IDPs and refugees, may be exaggerated, but if it is true the proportion of ethnic Abkhaz in the entire population (less than 100,000 before the conflict began) cannot exceed one-third. Even in 1993, directly after the end of hostilities and when expulsion of most of the Georgian population (described by many as "ethnic cleansing") was practically over, the Sukhumi leadership announced that the Abkhaz would not tolerate becoming a minority again in their own country.[7] According to some estimates, after many had fled or been driven out the ethnic Abkhaz became a majority of 65%:[8] if this is a true estimate, the total population must have declined to under 150,000. In any event the decline in labour resources is obvious.

If we assume theoretically that Abkhazia will become a monoethnic (Abkhaz) state it will be incapable of supplying even key sectors of its industry with a workforce. According to the 1989 Population Census, the employed (economically active) population in Abkhazia amounted to 260,042 persons, while the employed ethnic Abkhaz population (for the whole of Georgia: data for Abkhazia alone are not given, but the figure must be 1,000-2,000 less) numbered 47,954 persons (including 15,694 in intellectual work and 12,228 in manual agricultural work).[9] In the

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5 A. Krylov, "Peregovory mogut prekratit'sia po vine Tbilisi: takoe mnenie v intervyu 'NG' vyskazal prezident Respubliki Abkhaziya V. Ardzinba", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 March.1997.

6 Sakartvelos respublikis sotsialur-ekonomikuri informatsiis komiteti, *Sakartvelos regionebis sotsialur-ekonomikuri mdgomareoba*, op.cit., p. 3

7 I. Rotar', "Dazhe reguliarnye voyska inogda maroderstvuyut: intervyu c V. Ardzinba", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 15 October 1993.

8 F. Corley, "Peoples on the move" *War report*, no. 28, January/February 1997, pp. 22-23

9 Sakartvelos mosakhleobis dasakmeba. Sakartelos respublikis sotsialur-ekonomikuri informatsiis komiteti, *Statistikuri krebuli*, Natsili 2, Tbilisi, 1992, pp. 74, 196, 200.

absence of recent data it may be assumed with reasonable confidence that at best the labour resources of the ethnic Abkhaz have remained at the previous quantitative level or, most likely, have declined because of the war and emigration. Merely to restore the potentially most profitable sector in Abkhazia, the tourist and recreation industry (including both direct services and infrastructure such as industrial, transport, agricultural, trading and sales and cultural and entertainment sectors) to its 1988 level (the last year without overt confrontation in the Abkhazian ASSR) will require not less than 40,000 workers according to the most modest estimates, and several times more for improvements and expansion. The population "is not enough to man the economy, let alone reconstruct the infrastructure of the area".[10] This implies a necessity for recruiting additional (ethnically non-Abkhaz) labour from outside. I am not hinting that these labour resources must automatically come from among ethnic Georgians and that the economy cannot be restored without these. It is merely observed here that using a multi-ethnic workforce and maintaining a heterogeneous population are inevitable if there is to be economic growth in Abkhazia.

It cannot be right to maintain that any country that has been legally recognised as an independent state will not be able to survive in the conditions prevailing at the end of the 20th century. Russian "national-patriots" foretold great political difficulties and all but starvation for the Newly Independent States (NIS) unless they turned to the former empire for aid. For example, in 1994 the then Chairman of the State Duma Committee for links with the CIS forecast with respect to a number of NIS, that they have "to become our satellites or die".[11] In fact, however, by closing the rail link through Chechnya and allowing the secessionists to cut themselves off from the three Transcaucasian states, Russia has merely produced a situation in which these states have established new economic ties, have survived and have learned to live without the former empire. Georgia is definitely moving towards a market economy: privatisation is proceeding rapidly, the stability of the new currency – the Lari – introduced in 1995 is being maintained (the Russian ruble is still used as currency in Abkhazia), and in spite of obvious difficulties there are visible signs of economic recovery. All this is being achieved with the help of international community.

This example might also inspire secessionist regions – local elites may argue that even the very small states that may emerge in their territories could survive and even flourish. However, normal economic development can be achieved only through contacts with the outside world, which will follow only after a full political settlement is reached. In such a case Abkhazia also can enjoy the benefits which the unified state will obtain from its position in terms of transport and geography. There may be a widening of the "Central Asia-Europe" transport corridor affecting Abkhazia. The proposed railway around the Black Sea and the "North-South" transport corridor assume the use of the territory of Abkhazia as well.

Of course, one may argue that there is also an option of economic development for Abkhazia within, or with special aid from, another larger state. The latter option is difficult to consider in current circumstances, as it implies a certain (clearly irresponsible) political decision – if a state is prepared to issue a challenge to the international community by recognising as independent, or taking under its wing, a secessionist region which Georgia regards as an integral part of itself, referring not without good reason to international law.

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10 P.B. Henze, "Georgia and Armenia: Troubled independence", *Eurasian Studies*, no. 2, 1995, pp. 25-35.

11 I. Rotar', "Stat' nashimi satellitami ili umeret': takovo mnenie o Blizhnem Zarubezhye Konstantina Zatulina – Predsedatelya komiteta po delam SNG i svyazyam s sootechestvennikami Gosudarstvennoy Dumy", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 May 1994.

The Cultural-Geographical Background

Some attention must be given to ethnic dynamics and to the attitude of public opinion to them in order to understand the cultural-geographical aspects of the conflict.

Since the 1950s the numbers of ethnic Abkhaz, which had fluctuated previously,[12] have shown a clear rising trend: their proportion in the Autonomous Republic population rose from 15.1% in 1959 to 17.8% in 1989 (from 61,200 to 95,300 in absolute terms), while the proportion of Georgians increased from 39.1% to 45.7% during the same period. Whereas in 1959 the Abkhaz were fourth in terms of numbers among the nationalities in the Autonomous Republic (Russians and Armenians also outnumbered them), they were in second place by 1989.

Under Soviet authority the "titular nation" of a Union or an Autonomous Republic had definite official and unofficial advantages of representation in the administration, and in a bureaucratic state such as the USSR this was of decisive importance throughout public life: the Abkhaz held a greater proportion of such posts than their numbers in the population as a whole.[13] A sort of "affirmative action" was pursued in relation to the ethnic Abkhaz – the titular nation, but a minority in terms of numbers.[14] After the independence of Georgia was restored (1991) its first, extremely nationalistic President, agreed to a formula for elections to the local Supreme Council (parliament) in which the ethnic Abkhaz obtained a relative majority of seats. None of the above should be regarded as some kind of "excess of charity": in my opinion the Abkhaz must be given even more special guarantees of free development for the future.

However, all this was seen by the local Georgian population as encroachment on their rights as a community (this is not a matter of "democratic rights", because even now there is a long way to go to democracy), especially against the background of demands by the ethnic Abkhaz for separation from Georgia as a sovereign republic or joining the Russian Federation directly: such a development would mean the local Georgians becoming an "actual minority" (in terms of legal rights) and for Georgia as a whole the loss of over 12% of its territory and about 10% of its population. Meanwhile, in complaints by the Abkhaz addressed to the Soviet leadership the existence of Abkhazia as an autonomous republic within Georgia was declared to be an historical injustice; the numerical superiority of the ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia was seen as intentionally created by the communist government of Georgia and the repressions of the Stalinist era as specifically aimed only at the Abkhaz.[15] As a rule there were no complaints of direct political, social or economic discrimination by any ethnic Abkhaz as an individual; the collective complaints were only about the rights of one ethnic community, while the rights of the other communities were almost completely ignored. Without entering into a discussion on the extent to which the complaints were justified, I wish to put forward some brief views on certain ethno-demographic issues that are clearly territorial in nature (the cultural-geographic dimension).

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12 For more detail see R. Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia: Space, Society, Politics*, London, UCL Press, 1995.

13 D. Slider, "Crisis and response in Soviet Nationality Policy: the Case of Abkhazia", *Central Asian Survey* 4(4), 1985, p. 54.

14 Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR,* Princeton/New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 362.

15 Obrashchenie [uchastnikov sobraniya v sele Lykhny Gudautskogo raiona] k General'nomy sekretaryu TsK KPSS, Predsedatelyu Presidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR tovarishchu M.S. Gorbachovu, *Sovyetskaya Abkhaziya*, 24 March 1989.

The values, or "ideas and beliefs shared by the people in a society on what is important and worthwhile"[16] of the Georgians and Abkhaz are quite similar, though not identical. In the conflict between them something like a "clash of civilisations"[17] is not apparent. Rather the opposite: they definitely share a common cultural and historical heritage from medieval times, when the Georgian Bagrationi dynasty called themselves the kings "of the Abkhaz and Georgians", while the realm itself, embracing the territory of present-day Georgia with its own name of "Sakartvelo" (i.e. Georgia) since the 10th century, was known among the neighbouring nations in the 10-13th centuries as "Abazgia" (i.e. Abkhazia).

From the 10th right up to the end of the 19th century the language of worship for the Orthodox Abkhaz (who were an absolute majority among the Abzhu or Ochamchira Abkhaz to the south of the River Kodori and accounted for a substantial proportion of the rest of the Abkhaz) was ancient Georgian. For the Bzyb (Gudauta) Abkhaz, however, many of whom had been converted to Islam in the late middle ages, the Georgian language and culture had become quite remote. However, Islam does not play a dominant part in their social life: almost all the true Muslim Abkhaz emigrated to the Ottoman Empire some 120 years ago. Incidentally, some Georgians take the view that it is the Bzyb Abkhaz who are the main supporters of secession, although this may be incorrect.

When the Russian Empire was expanding rapidly southwards and reached the Transcaucasus at the beginning of the 19th century, this territory, including Abkhazia, was essential to the Empire as a military bridgehead rather than as an area to be opened up economically. Economic interest in the Sukhumskiy okrug (Sukhumi region) – as Abkhazia was called at the time – increased only during the last third of the 19th century. The possibility that this was why tsarism decided on the direct annexation of a previously 'autonomous' principality (1864) and a drastic change in the ethnic structure of the population of Abkhazia (following the example of the North-West Caucasus, which was settled by the Slavic peoples mainly after expulsion of the Adighean peoples in the 1860s) cannot be ruled out. The expulsion in 1878 of more than half (32,000) of the ethnic Abkhaz,[18] almost half of whom soon returned,[19] into the Ottoman Empire was provoked by the tsarist authorities (although both the Ottoman government and the Muslim clergy had a hand in it, not a single Georgian had participated in it). This was followed by settlement of the vacant lands both by "planned" Slavic immigrants from European Russia and by Armenians, Greeks and, least desirable from the Imperial viewpoint, Georgians from the neighbouring districts or from the south-east of the Sukhumi region itself.[20]

In contrast to the North Caucasus, in Abkhazia not a Slavic but a Georgian population grew rapidly: the latter lived in similar ecological conditions and adapted more easily to the Abkhazian coastal environment, infected to a considerable extent by malaria at that time, and to alpine conditions. These natural conditions limited the influx of a Russian population (malaria was eradicated only by the 1930s). According to the Imperial administrative statistics, the Georgians were already a relative majority in Abkhazia before the First World War I.[21] Incidentally, in the 1920s-40s conditions for Russian population growth in Abkhazia were not less (and possibly

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16 J.R. Eshelman, B.G. Cashion, L.A. Basirico, *Sociology: An Introduction*, New York, Harper Collins, 1988, p. 69.

17 S.P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

18 "Statisticheskie tablitsy naseleniya Kavkazskogo regiona", in: N. Seidlitz (ed.), *Sbornik Svedeniy o Kavkaze*, vol. VII, Tiflis, Tipografia glavnogo upravlenia namestnika kavkazskogo, 1880.

19 Z.V. Anchabadze, *Ocherk etnicheskoy istorii abkhazskogo naroda,* Sukhumi, Alashara, 1976, p. 86.

20 Ibid.

more) favourable than for Georgians: in the period between censuses from 1926 to 1959 the number of Russians increased from 12,000 to 87,000, i.e. by 7.2 times, while during the same period the numbers of Armenians increased by 2.6 times and of Georgians – by 2.3 times.[22] However, the increase in the non-Georgian ethnic groups was never seen by Abkhaz scholars (or by Abkhaz public opinion) as a "demographic threat". The reason for such a specific approach can be understood when a broader cultural-geographical context is considered.

The growth in the relative importance of the Georgian population in Abkhazia since the end of the 19th century, at the same time as a rapid consolidation of the Georgian nation and an increase in its national consciousness, aroused suspicion in the tsarist government. Again the geographical factor was important: the Georgian provinces bordered the Sukhumi region directly and, unlike the Greeks or Armenians for example, whose main area of settlement was much further away, the continuous area of Georgian settlement was expanding and they were becoming direct competitors for the Russians in this sector of the Black Sea shore. This geo-demographic trend was artificially transformed later into one of the principal causes of inter-ethnic tension, although the new Georgian settlers did not drive out any ethnic Abkhaz, for the simple reason that the latter had already gone and the land was regarded as belonging to no-body.

The Empire moved to encourage Abkhaz ethnic nationalism as a counterweight to Georgian nationalism, which was regarded as more dangerous. As a preventive measure to check growing Georgian influence, strict cultural demarcation between the Georgians and Abkhaz was imposed. Previously their elites (the noblemen) had many points of contact, not to mention ties of blood and friendship. Zurab Anchabadze, the noted Abkhazian historian, gives a typical example of this policy, quoting a report by an Imperial civil servant at the beginning of this century: "of course the Abkhazian language, being unwritten and having no literature, is doomed to disappear in the more or less immediate future. The question is which language will replace it? Obviously the vehicle for bringing cultural ideas and concepts to the population should be the Russian language, not the Georgian. It appears to me, therefore that establishing a written Abkhaz language should not be an end in itself but merely a means of weakening, by way of church and school, the demand for the Georgian language and gradually replacing it by the state [Russian] language".[23] Hence the Abkhaz alphabet, based on Cyrillic, was introduced (the Georgian language has used its own alphabet since the 5th century A.D.) and in 1912 the first work of Abkhaz literature was published. The creation of a written Abkhazian language and the emergence of a nation should only be welcomed. The only problem is that the tsarist government gave that positive process an imperial slant: "divide and rule".

The repressions of the Stalinist era damaged all Soviet peoples almost equally: the losses of the Georgians, particularly the intelligentsia, were no less proportionally than those of any other Soviet nation. It is hard to say that the terror was aimed specifically at the numerically small Abkhaz nation and might have led to their numerical decline. Statistics show the contrary: in two years, from January 1937 to 1939, i.e. when repression was at its height, the number of Abkhaz increased by 1.8%.[24] Of course, the Abkhaz also were victims of totalitarianism, particularly in the 1940s and at the beginning of the 1950s, when the total lawlessness of the Soviet authorities

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21 *Sakartvelos akhal administratsiul erteulebad daqopis proekti. Memorandumi – statistikuri tskhrilebi*, Tbilisi, Saxelmtsipo stamba, 1920.

22 A. Totadze, *Sakartvelos demografiuli portreti*, Tbilisi, Samshoblo, 1993, p. 69.

23 Z.V. Anchabadze, *Ocherk etnicheskoy istorii abkhazskogo naroda*, Sukhumi, Alashara, 1976, p. 96.

24 R. Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia: Space, Society, Politics*, op.cit., p. 84.

in relation to entire nations or subethnic groups (deportation of some North Caucasian peoples, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Meskhetian Muslims, Pontic Greeks, and so on) affected the Abkhaz as well, who were subjected to certain attempts to assimilate them to the Georgians. I wish to express my abhorrence at all this, so that there are no misunderstandings. The historical memory of such events is damaging to mutual understanding among peoples.

However, in spite of the widely-held view, this was not an exceptional phenomenon "started by the Georgians Stalin and Beria" who, they say, practised a sort of "Georgian chauvinism" in Abkhazia. Without wishing to defend these individuals in any way it should first be said that in reconstructing the empire Stalin was indifferent to the fate of small nations, whether they were the Georgians, Abkhaz or any others: if he had thought that the Abkhaz were a threat to HIS Empire he would not have bothered with a prolonged process of assimilation, but would simply have ordered their deportation, as in the case of the much more numerous Chechens. Secondly, under Stalin there were similar processes in other republics: for example, many Iranian-speaking Kurds, Tats and Talishs were assimilated to Turkic-speaking Azeris[25] and the ethnic consciousness of the Ingilos (Muslim Georgians) in the then Azerbaijan SSR was eroded, although the "Father of the nations" was not an Azeri. The process of russifying certain Ugro-Finnish nations was under way: as the Russian demographer V. Kozlov wrote

> among the nations in autonomous republics of the RSFSR...the processes of transition to another language, usually Russian, increased on the whole in the period from 1926 to 1959. The proportion of those who replaced their mother tongue was particularly high among the Mordva (from 6 to 22%) and Karelians (from 4.5 to 28.7%).[26]

The Soviet authorities obviously took the view, though without advertising this doctrine, that small nations should merge with the larger Soviet Republic titular nations, in order to "consolidate" the latter in the future to form a kind of "Soviet supernation". In the 1970s, the birth of a "new historical community – the Soviet people" was announced, the obvious assumption being that it would be Russian-speaking. Fortunately, by this time mass repressions were no longer being practised and the regime did not particularly pursue the russification of the "Soviet people", although this process was encouraged. Russification especially affected small nations, including the Abkhaz, which are, on the whole rightly, regarded as Russian speakers. (This is specifically stressed by the Russian nationalists who appeal for their "protection" outside the borders of Russia, which is perceived by other nations, also rightly, as "neo-imperialism".)

However, even under Stalinism relations at the personal level between the Abkhaz and Georgians were fairly close. This is indicated by the widespread intermarriages and even the assimilation of a certain proportion of Georgians into the Abkhaz cultural environment, especially in rural areas. Obviously this is why many Abkhaz have Georgian surnames and Georgian roots: this is a normal process of ethnic interaction. Incidentally there has been practically no process of assimilation of the Abkhaz by Georgians in the Autonomous Republic. Although there was a cultural take-over of ethnic groups living in Abkhazia, this was entirely based on the Russian language. This affected most Abkhaz and many of the local Georgians: among the children of the latter the proportion of those studying in Russian schools was almost 3.5 times higher than in the rest of Georgia, where most Georgian children were taught in their mother tongue.[27] Russian was used as the actual lingua franca in Abkhazia and in practice no-one was putting Georgian

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25 Yu.V. Bromley (ed.), *Narody mira: istoriko-demograficheskii spravochnik. Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Moscow, 1988, p. 430.

26 V.I. Kozlov, *Natsional'nosti SSSR (etnodemograficheskii obzor),* Moscow, Statistika, 1975, p. 215.

27 A. Totadze, *Sakartvelos demografiuli portreti*, Tbilisi, Samshoblo, 1993, p. 192.

forward as such (although it was regarded as the state language throughout Georgia).

The settlement of Georgians and Abkhaz in the Autonomous Republic was a patchwork, and interethnic cultural and economic contacts were intensive. According to data for 1989, only the Gali district was practically mono-ethnic: the Georgians accounted for over 93% there. Only in the Gudauta district was there a majority of the Abkhaz (53%; the local Armenians accounted for 15% and the Russians and Georgians for 13-14% each) and Georgians were in the majority in the Gulripshi district (53%, followed by Armenians – 25% and Russians – 13%; the proportion of the Abkhaz here was a mere 2.4%). In the remaining towns and districts no one ethnic group accounted for more than half: the Georgians had a relative majority in the city of Sukhumi (42%, followed by 22% Russians and 13% Abkhazians), while the Abkhaz predominated in the city of Tkvarcheli (42%, with 24% each of Russians and Georgians). Georgians predominated in the rural district of Ochamchira (40%, followed by 37% Abkhaz) and in the Sukhumi rural district (44%, with 29% Armenians, 10% Greeks, 7% Russians and 5% Abkhaz). In the territory of the Gagra City Council Armenians, Georgians and Russians were more or less equal in number – 24-29% each – while the Abkhaz there accounted for 9%.[28] Leaving out the monoethnic Gali region, the historical site of settlement of a Georgian subethnic group (Megrelians), there were 160,000 Georgians, or 36% of the total population, in the rest of the territory of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz accounted for 20% and Armenians, Russians, Greeks and others for 44%.

It can be argued that "the Georgian demographic problem" for the ethnic Abkhaz was relative rather than absolute: the absorption of the latter by the Georgians was not a real danger. If there was a linguistic conflict it was between Russian and Georgian, not between Abkhaz and Georgian. The real problem was political, not demographic. The civil war helped to make the interethnic conflict much worse, to the point where representatives of the different communities said that living together in one town, village or region was impossible. The property of many families from both sides was looted, burned or taken over; many houses abandoned by fleeing families are now occupied by families of other nationalities. The process of restoring peace and order may be very long and difficult. It is even possible that, after the IDPs return to Abkhazia, separate settlement of the ethnic communities may be a panacea for a while to allow wounds to heal and gradually restore confidence at the personal level. And there is no doubt that such confidence existed previously.

It should be noted that the standard stereotype of an Abkhaz among the Georgians is a positive one, because it is created on the basis of classic Georgian literature, in which the Abkhaz are represented as noble, hospitable and brave people. Even at the height of the civil war there was no anti-Abkhaz hysteria, and in Georgia proper and particularly in Tbilisi there were no anti-Abkhaz slogans to be seen; the fairly free Georgian press often stressed the positive features in relations between Abkhaz and Georgians (even during the military operations and the subsequent ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia), and many atrocities in the war were ascribed, possibly without foundation, to alien, unknown "North Caucasians" and persons of other nationalities, but not to the ethnic Abkhaz.

There were no direct contacts between most Georgians from the rest of Georgia and the Abkhaz if the former did not travel to particular regions of Abkhazia, so that the mythological stereotypes remained alive. On the other hand, the majority of the Abkhaz were in contact with Georgians. This does not imply the creation of *a priori* negative opinions about each other; most probably

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28 Sakartvelos dasakhlebuli punktebi da mosakhleoba. Sakartvelos respublikis statistikis sakhelmtsipo komiteti, *Sakartvelos dasakhlebuli punktebi da mosakhleoba. Statistikuri krebuli*, Tbilisi, 1990.

there were many more pleasant than unpleasant episodes at personal inter-ethnic contact level: the general Caucasian traditions of hospitality, neighbourly solidarity and feasting are typical of both the Abkhaz and the Georgians.

Perfectly reasonable questions may arise on reading the above: "What is going on? Is it possible that the conflict arose without cause? Did someone stir it up? Is only 'the hand of the Kremlin' to blame again?" The answer may be that of course the Kremlin had a hand in the conflict. However, this cannot be the complete explanation for the conflict, which had ripened over a period of decades. It became particularly acute in 1989, when the Abkhaz political and intellectual elite appealed to Moscow demanding secession from Georgia: the Appeal was signed by many ethnic Abkhaz. This led to an escalation of the conflict, and large-scale disorder claiming many victims. On the surface of the conflict there were visible ethno-cultural differences (but these were not decisive), problems of ethno-demographic change (a fairly frequent argument by the Abkhaz) and wounded national pride (on both sides). The pattern of Abkhaz thought might have been approximately as follows: "we are few, and the Georgians are many; they do not give us our lawful statehood; we must neutralise them with the aid of Russia, giving Russia jurisdiction over our territory". The pattern of thought among the local Georgians might have been something like this: "the Abkhaz are a minority but they are oppressing us, the majority; they want to create their own separate state illegally out of our territory or to seize our land for the benefit of Russia, where we will be an unprotected minority".

Although there was an obvious clash of interests, such ideas could not in themselves lead to conflict, still less to warfare, until they became public property and a "guide to action": someone really must have needed the ideas to begin "to work for conflict". It is clear who could gain from inciting conflict from without, especially after the Georgian national liberation movement (or "Georgian nationalism"[29]) had begun to gather momentum since 1987 and, in the fully justified opinion of Kremlin analysts, began to threaten the established order in the USSR: the old imperialist motto "divide and rule" is as true as ever it was! However, even the imported seeds of conflict need local soil, and local gardeners even more. Someone from within must deliberately guide the situation towards conflict.

It is easy to ascribe the complications in inter-ethnic relations to the completely visible actions and widely read works of the intellectual elites, above all the historians, whose profession is "constantly to re-open old wounds so that the nation is always on the alert" and no less to writers and journalists who cannot, of course, keep silent if "the other side has written something wrong" and immediately call upon public opinion, which instantly heats up. The more a writer or scholar is a "patriot", the less he may feel bound to ensure the validity of his sources, relying mainly on emotion. This affects both sides, Abkhaz and Georgians. However, the somewhat trivial view seems to be more accurate: the conflict was most probably stirred up by ethnic political elites (nomenklatura), each wanting "a bigger slice of the national cake": the undercover fight of the bureaucratic (nomenklatura) bulldogs of various shades in Abkhazia was always because of the high and obviously highly profitable posts, while academics and poets merely ennobled this fight.

As a result of the civil war the ethnic Abkhaz elite does not have to share power either with the Georgians or with anyone else. Ideally, under democratic conditions, moral and professional qualities should play a part in the election of a politician, not national allegiance. Unfortunately such an ideal position is a long way off (and not only in Abkhazia or Georgia, but also in many quite highly developed countries).

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29 R.J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*, op.cit.

The Political-Geographical Background

It seems preferable to consider many geopolitical issues at the regional, all-Caucasian level. In the course of the last five centuries the Caucasus has been a subject of dispute and an area of expansion involving three regional superpowers – the Russian empire (tsarist, Soviet), the Ottoman empire and the Persian empire. During the past two centuries the dominant power in the Caucasus has been Russia, which became a world superpower in the 20th century. Even now, when the Soviet Union has disintegrated, Russia regards the three states of the Transcaucasus as its "near abroad", maintaining military bases in two of them (Armenia, Georgia) and retaining control over their external frontiers, actually limiting their sovereignty.

It is natural that Russia, in spite of a policy that is sometimes contradictory and outwardly inconsistent, has an interest in its own military security in the region and therefore views any internal conflicts in the Transcaucasus from this position. Influential politicians in Moscow (but not all of them) take the view that the conflict in Abkhazia is not a real threat to the security of Russia, since both parties to it rely on preferential aid from the latter. Russia can therefore allow itself to help both sides in escalating the conflict and then delay its settlement, justifying this by the "fear of complicating its relations with nations of the Northern Caucasus" (many of which are sensitive towards the measures against their kinsfolk – the Abkhaz). On the other hand wise Russian politicians cannot fail to see that the example of Abkhaz secessionism, should it ultimately succeed, may be followed in the Russian Northern Caucasus. Incidentally the best Chechen fighters received their baptism of fire in the Abkhaz civil war, where they fought against the Georgians alongside many ethnic Russian troops (officially retired), and later successfully used the weapons and military know-how gained with their assistance against Moscow.

Small states always have to take international interests into account to a greater extent than the dominant powers[30] although the latter also are obliged to respect general interests. Therefore relations between the centre of such a small state and its secessionist regions cannot always be settled at the bilateral level. Even when the parties declare "*Their* firm intention" they are in fact taking the prevailing international situation into account and hope to use it to their advantage. In this sense, if we view the position objectively, a recognised state usually has more possibilities than its breakaway province: even in spite of possible military successes the latter will be able to resist for just as long as the central government takes to arrange its relations with the stronger power that has decided to act as "referee". These relations can be arranged through specific concessions or deals, or through the rivals of that same "referee". Of course, this may take a long time or, in a situation very favourable for the secessionists, may not occur at all. Much depends upon the success of diplomacy.

In our specific case the vital factors in the conflict are geography and economics, not ethnic or political history and they influence policy. Georgia was the only one of the eight southern NIS with access to the open sea. A substantial section of the Eurasian transport corridor (at least in the foreseeable future) will pass through its territory (possibly even through Abkhazia). If it is in Russia's interest to reap the benefit of this corridor, political stability in the region will serve its purpose. Conversely, if it sees no advantage in it Russia can use the "ethnic conflict" trump card, especially close to its borders. Some Moscow political scientists (who did not wish to be named) openly urged the Russian government to stir up these conflicts artificially.[31]

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30 A. Rondeli, "Georgia in the Post-Soviet Space", *Caucasian Regional Studies*, no. 1, 1996, pp. 96-100.

31 "Commonwealth of Independent States: the beginning or the end of history?", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 26 March 1997.

Under present conditions practically all the NIS have to manoeuvre, in order to avoid directly confronting the former centre of empire, where a new "Monroe doctrine", while not declared by the official executive authority, is being implemented in practice by the legislative authority.[32] The geopolitical location of the NIS and their regions can explain much in this context: both the international relations of each of them and the practical results of those relations.

It is quite natural for Russia to devote more attention to Abkhazia, which has a direct frontier with the Russian Federation and whose resorts have traditionally been the holiday destinations of Moscow's political, and more importantly military, elite (according to the press, Russian generals still use these resorts extensively and own holiday houses there[33]), than to other ethnic regions in the "near abroad".

Russia must not be regarded as some kind of "evil genius" who just wants to spoil things for Georgia or as too large to bother to keep a close eye on Georgia, or still less Abkhazia. Inconsistency in Transcaucasian policy is just an illusion: Russia wants safe borders, and artificially creating enemies for itself, even in the form of small states, cannot be in its interests. Russia would prefer Georgia to be tied to its policy and regards Abkhazia as a "good hook" to prevent Georgia from straying too far. But a strategic partnership with Georgia, if the latter always feels humbled and deprived of its rightful heritage, will be an unreliable one. Probably Russia simply "didn't have time" to settle the conflict. But the longer it takes to find time, the greater the number of other candidates for strategic partnership.

The actual possibility of other countries in the region influencing the settlement of the conflict at the moment are limited. Turkey, which has quickly become a leading power in the Black Sea area, even if inherently interested in extending its influence in the Caucasus, has expressed no intention of interfering in what it may regard as "an internal affair of the CIS". The world powers, even further from the region, initially confined themselves to playing the part of detached observer. "In the early years of the post-cold war period, Western governments failed to develop a clear regional concept of the Caucasus within the framework of their European security policies. Their interest in the region remained marginal. Their Caucasian policies were subordinated to their relations with Turkey and, especially, Russia."[34] However, after the autumn of 1994, when the western countries' interest in developing Caspian oil began to increase sharply, their interest in Caucasian politics increased also. The issue of the route for transporting the oil and building pipelines went beyond purely economic decisions and became an issue of high policy. It is probable that Georgia's territory will be chosen for routing pipelines vital to the West.

On the other hand, as Coppieters states:

> The issues of the oil wealth in the Caspian Sea and the routing of pipelines have dual consequences. On the one hand, they make the pacification of this region by international agreements more imperative, while, at the same time, they increase destabilization by generating fierce international competition among those attempting to gain a foothold there. In the long term, the economic interests of all the players involved in the Caucasus lie in the lasting settlement of the main ethnic conflicts. This does not mean that any of these players is prepared to accept such

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32 D. Trenin, "Russia's Security Interests and Policies in the Caucasus Region", in: B. Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels, VUB Press, 1996, pp. 91-102.

33 *Moskovski Komsomolets*, 10 June 1997.

34 B. Coppieters, "Conclusions: The Caucasus as a Security Complex", in: B. Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, op.cit., p. 196.

> pacification unconditionally, or that they are all pursuing a foreign policy based on primary economic interests.[35]

The new political realities in the Caucasus clearly increase the opportunity for foreign policy tactics for Georgia somewhat. Abkhazia, however, can only count on Russia, which in turn must want to "keep Georgia on the Abkhazian hook". If this becomes unnecessary, because a strategic partnership with Georgia will be guaranteed without it, or Russia cannot do this because circumstances (for example, domestic difficulties or active intervention by international organisations) will not allow it to continue such a policy, Russia may cease its actual support for Abkhazia. Most probably Russia will not give up its traditional "hook" so easily, but may relax the tension on the line, the more so because an economic interest for Russian capital may be found in Georgia.

In the case of Georgia, foreign policy diversification is becoming a vital priority. The steady though slow movement towards democracy, the achievement of internal political stability, the signs of economic revival and the definite marginalisation of radical nationalism are helping to increase international interest in Georgia. If its internal conflicts end happily this will enhance Georgia's investment value and may bring peace and welfare to all parts of it, including Abkhazia.

It is obvious that neither side is interested in resuming the war. An unbiased and impartial negotiator is essential for a peaceful solution to the conflict, a part that could be played by international organisations. As for internal political geography, Tbilisi is definitely ready to overcome bitter internal opposition to the federalisation of Georgia and to offer Abkhazia a special status (and more rights and guarantees for the Abkhaz) within a single state – an "asymmetrical federation". The recognition of Abkhazia (actually – the ethnic Abkhazians) and the rest of Georgia as equal partners in the federation (actually a confederation) which is presented as a "concession" from the Abkhaz side, is equivalent to the recognition of Abkhazia's independence and is unacceptable to Tbilisi and to Georgian public opinion. Above all, in Georgia there are other ethnic regions which would like to have a similar status, and this is the route to disintegration of the state.

On the other hand it is understandable that Suhkumi is not ready to accept the proposal of a "special status for Abkhazia within a single Georgia", to let the refugees and IDPs return (there is a quite understandable fear of these people returning to their houses – destroyed or taken over by other families). The "burden of victory" outweighs any economic or other proposal based on rationality: it might be difficult to explain to the local public, still influenced by the euphoria of "military achievements", the necessity for real concessions to prevent a resumption of the war, especially when there is always faith in "invisible hand of the elder brother" which will come and help at the proper time. Nevertheless it is not always necessary to be defeated in order to learn something: the decision-makers must find the courage to persuade their people to look the future in the face and to come to a compromise.

Conclusion

Of the hypotheses set out above, the more self-evident seems to me to be that a single economic space will be advantageous to all of Georgia, including Abkhazia. The international community would also prefer to deal with a single Georgia rather than with several creatures of international law that are too small, the more so because the division of one country always revives the "domino effect". In addition, stability and peace in the region are guarantees of safety for foreign

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35 B. Coppieters, "Introduction", in: Ibid., p. 9.

investments. The possibility that Russia will find a profitable economic niche in the Transcaucasus cannot be ruled out. In addition Russia will be able to guarantee its strategic security in the region by collaborating with Georgia on an equal footing, not by confrontation.

Theoretically there are no serious obstacles to finding common points of contact between the Georgian and Abkhaz nations. However, the assumption that it will be relatively easy to overcome the psychological problems of coexistence is not really justified: inter-ethnic relations have been seriously damaged by the civil war and its consequences to the point of incompa-tibility, which we hope is temporary. Perhaps initially, after the refugees and IDPs have returned to Abkhazia, it will be better if conditions can be created for the two ethnic groups to live apart temporarily (e.g. in separate villages, towns or districts). From this point of view international organisations (e.g. by way of police forces to maintain public order) may be particularly helpful.

The greatest problem in settling the conflict arises from the issue of Abkhazia's political status and the geopolitical calculations of the third force. Restoring the territorial integrity of the single state is the aim of the Tbilisi government, while Sukhumi regards this as unacceptable. International organisations and the world community as a whole may play a decisive part in settling the conflict.

Yuri Anchabadze

Georgia and Abkhazia: The Hard Road to Agreement

It is a truism that any war is concluded with a peace. However, the long-awaited peace does not come all at once. An end to military action does *not* mean that the parties are immediately ready to use political methods to settle the problems that could not be resolved on the field of battle. It takes time, sometimes a considerable period, before the parties can rid themselves of the inertia of confrontational thinking and make the transition from a categorical refusal to accept the enemy's position, the highest degree of this (refusal) being war, to a dialogue based on a sober understanding of the opportunities for alternative solutions and mutual compromises.

Any social conflict, including inter-ethnic conflicts, has its own specific features, so the logic of its occurrence and pattern of development cannot be entirely explained by reference to general principles. The parties' route to peace is equally individualistic. It often fails to fit into the expected framework, because considerations of logic and expediency frequently give way to completely different arguments, governed on the one hand by the desire (normal in behind-the-scenes diplomacy) to outsmart the other party, to obtain unilateral political advantages, to consolidate the results of the war or, conversely, to modify them, and the like. At the same time different priorities shape the parties' "peace" strategy. These priorities are governed to a considerable extent by certain constants in the mass historical and ethno-social consciousness, acting as a prism through which a particular ethnic group scrutinises the prehistory of the conflict, the war and its results, as well as the desired outlines of the future peace. Considerations of this kind do not always find verbal expression at the official level. Often, however, it is their dominant influence that really bars the way to peace and agreement. The clashes in the four-year-long Georgian-Abkhazian peace dialogue provide a great opportunity for tracing this extremely specific and peculiar phenomenon, which persists as a background to the negotiating process.

The parties' assessment of the historical experience of Abkhazian-Georgian relationships is a vital factor in the range of public moods connected with the war. To the Abkhazians this experience is entirely negative. Its principal landmarks are seen in the context of "Georgia's 100-year war against Abkhazia",[1] and its main element is seen to be a constant drive by Georgia to absorb Abkhazia politically, demographically and ethnically. The historical memory of the Abkhazians still puts the sources of confrontation in the pre-revolutionary period, but the view is that the full offensive by Georgia against Abkhazia came during the Soviet years, reaching its high point during the Stalinist period. This period has been the source of many extremely painful memories in the recent history of the Abkhazians, particularly the successive reductions in the legal status of Abkhazia (a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921, and an Autonomous Republic as part of the Georgian SSR in 1931), the repressive policy of Georgianization implemented from the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1950s, the large-scale colonization of Abkhazian lands during the same period by settlers from Georgia, and the concept of ethnic identity of Abkhazians and Georgians officially approved as a "scientific truth".

During the post-Stalinist period the most offensive forms of Georgianization were eliminated. However, the purely formal nature of the autonomous republic's powers, the petty dependence of the local government upon the centre in Tbilisi, which in a number of cases could foist certain

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1 S. Lakoba, *Stoletnyaya voina Gruzii protiv Abkhazii*, Gagra, 1993.

decisions upon Sukhum, remained as irritants in Georgian-Abkhazian relations. The situation became explosive several times, in 1957, 1964, 1967 and 1987, and in July 1989 there were bloody inter-ethnic clashes with losses on both sides.

Anti-Georgian sentiments in Abkhazia received a fresh impetus in the recent post-war years and were directly linked to political processes in Georgia itself, where ethnocratic, unitary and chauvinist tendencies were developing to an ever-increasing extent. These trends had been fairly apparent under the last communist rulers, and reached their full flowering under the Gamsakhurdia regime, where the view that there should be no autonomous ethnic groupings in an independent and sovereign Georgia was openly expressed. The accession to power of Eduard Shevardnadze, who was extremely unpopular in Abkhazia, and the subsequent new wave of political and ideological confrontation between Sukhum and Tbilisi fixed the idea of Georgia's immemorial hostility to Abkhazia in Abkhazian public consciousness, thus reinforcing the pressure to keep some distance between the two.

At the same time Georgian public consciousness was being shaped by two factors. Importance is attached to the view that Abkhazia has been a constituent part of Georgia since time immemorial and historically has always belonged to Georgia, so that the prospect of independent and individual development for Abkhazia is seen as nonsense, an infringement of the inalienable territorial rights of the Republic of Georgia. Up to the present, historical arguments have played a vital part in official Tbilisi ideology, and there have been repeated statements at the highest level that "there is not a single inch of non-Georgian land in Georgia", that "Georgia will yield its historic lands to no-one" and so on.

There is also another widespread myth – that Georgia has some kind of paternalist role in relation to the Abkhazians. The view is that the Abkhazians, who have had very favourable conditions for social and cultural development in the Georgian Republic, have been able to retain their ethnic personality (again thanks to the single-minded solicitude of the Georgians), unlike the Caucasian peoples in the Russian autonomous republics, which have allegedly been totally Russified. Therefore the idea persists in the Georgian public consciousness that the Abkhazians are "ungrateful" and are trying to separate from Georgia illegally.

Each party thus bases its view of future peaceful coexistence upon its own firmly fixed historical and ethno-cultural ideas of their past experience of Georgian-Abkhazian relations, the negative features of which must be eliminated – it is thought that there is no need for talk, as each party interprets the negative features in its own way.

The lack of unity of views on what essentially took place in Abkhazia in 1992-1993 is another important factor that makes it difficult to achieve consensus. To the Abkhazians, the events of those years were an inter-state war between Georgia and Abkhazia. Right at the start of military action, on 15 September 1992, the Praesidium of the Abkhazian Supreme Council passed an ordinance declaring that "the armed attack by the forces of the Georgian State Council on Abkhazia on 14 August 1992 and the occupation of part of its territory" was "an act of aggression against the Republic of Abkhazia".[2] Later the idea of a patriotic war of liberation waged by the Abkhazian people against the Georgian invaders took root in the Abkhazian national consciousness.

For a long time the Georgian side could not define these events precisely, and still cannot do so. The first official assessments of the situation were heard on the third day of military action. On 17 August 1992 the Georgian State Council issued a statement that the events in Abkhazia

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2 *Abkhazia. Khronika voiny*, Moscow, 1993, Part 2, p. 9.

signified "a revision of the existing frontiers of Georgia and the severance of part of its territory" and also "an attempt to complete the process of usurpation of power and to set up a monoethnic dictatorship". The State Council used these factors to justify the necessity for sending troops into Abkhazia, declaring its resolve "to snuff out the conflict at the very beginning".[3]

However, it proved to be impossible to snuff out the conflict, either at the very beginning or much later. The clashes involving Georgian and Abkhazian units at the end of August and in September took on the features of large-scale military action which it became increasingly difficult to identify with the concept of "conflict". As a result the concept of war made its appearance in the official Tbilisi lexicon, and in time the propaganda machine began to interpret it as "the struggle for the territorial integrity of Georgia". However, even in the early stages of military action Eduard Shevardnadze coined a "stronger" definition, declaring in one of his interviews that what was happening was "aggression by international terrorism against a sovereign state".[4] After the defeat of the Georgian forces near Gagry at the beginning of October 1992, the concept of "aggression" became an integral part of Georgian propagandist clichés and official statements. Thus it was claimed in a letter dated 2 October 1992 from the State Committee to Dr. Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary General, that "Georgian forces have been the subject of blatant aggression".[5] Even today there is much talk in Georgia of "aggression", foreign intervention and the like.

The parties' evaluations of the practical results of the war naturally differ. In the Abkhazian view the war ended with the expulsion of the Georgians from the republic, the liberation of the motherland and victory in a just Patriotic War in which the Abkhazian people defended their right to self-determination as a national state. The Georgians were deeply wounded by the military defeat and by the *de facto* establishment of Abkhazian sovereignty. In regarding the war as aggression, the Georgian side evaluates its results in the same terms; in particular it speaks of the annexation of part of the territory of Georgia. Incidentally this concept was also formulated in the initial stages of the military action. Thus Aleksandr Kavsadze, who held an important government post at the time, identified the situation that developed after the Gagry defeat and the Georgians' forced withdrawal from the Gagry bridgehead as the *de facto* annexation of part of the territory of the Georgian Republic.[6] One of the recent Georgian political statements – made on 18 April 1997 by the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in exile – also refers to an "occupied historic region, Georgian from time immemorial".[7]

Though differing on many points of detail, the Georgian and Abkhazian evaluations of the war are similar in one respect – in denying that the conflict was ethnic in nature. Both Tbilisi and Sukhum insist that the sources of mutual conflict were political, and in a sense this is true. However, conflicts between political elites carried over into the collective consciousness cannot fail to excite feelings of ethnic hostility. In this case, aggravated by the losses and sacrifices in the war, these feelings have led to strengthening of negative emotions: persistent mutual loathing in which everything on the opposite ethnic side is seen as hostile, hateful and indefensible by any moral law, so that liquidation and destruction are permissible.

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3 Pamyatnaya zapiska "O sobytiyakh v Abkhazskoy avtonomnoy respublike", *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 20 August 1992.

4 E. Shevardnadze, 'Shulerskoe razygryvanie etnonatsional'nykh "kart" sozdast problemy ne tol'ko v Gruzii', *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 3 September 1992.

5 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 3 October 1992.

6 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 13 October 1992.

7 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 19 April 1997.

In the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, these features – typical of any war – took the form of mutual atrocities and vandalism . In a special statement by the Committee on Human Rights and International Relations the Georgian side made veiled references to atrocities against the enemy, in particular the torture of hostages and prisoners, "raids on the peaceful population"[8] (this euphemism covered stealing and looting), etc. and in a number of manifestations of "ethnic" war and the burning in Sukhum on 22 October 1992 of the Abkhazian State Archive and the Institute for Language, Literature and History. These could obviously have no military importance, so their destruction should be seen as an attempt to damage the enemy's spiritual heritage. At about the same time something similar was happening in the Balkans, where throughout 1992 Serbian artillery was systematically destroying Dubrovnik. Here also there was no military necessity for the destruction of this magnificent monument of pan-Slav culture. In the words of Professor Ivo Bonaca, an ethnic Croat, the aim was "to inflict serious injury upon the most intimate parts of the Croatian national consciousness".[9] Manifestations of ethnic intolerance were also characteristic of the Abkhazians. As they squeezed the Georgian forces at the end of September 1993 the advancing Abkhazian units totally destroyed Georgian villages, the inhabitants of which had abandoned their homes by that time and had fled into Georgia proper.

At present the psychological aims of both peoples have not changed; allowance should therefore be made for the fact that the road to a true peace may be made harder by yet another factor – acute mutual antipathy between Georgians and Abkhazians. Today extremely negative, low and pejorative images and assessments of each other prevail in the collective consciousness. The period of political and ideological confrontation, then the war, have altered the traditional assessments, making them unambiguously negative. The Georgian example is particularly striking in is respect. Georgians as a whole had a fairly high opinion of Abkhazians, who were seen as a nation with a rich traditional culture, which in some respects was a point of reference for Georgian culture. "Brought up (well) like an Abkhazian" – this Megrelian saying is clear evidence of the recognition of Abkhazian cultural standards as the ideal for the local Caucasian ethno-cultural milieu. The heroic status and idealization of the Abkhazian were also features of Georgian classical literature, particularly in the works of Akakii Tsereteli and Konstantin Gamsakhurdia.

With the onset of the conflict, however, the traditional stereotypes began to change; positive characteristics gave way to negative ones, and high opinions were pushed out by disparaging and sharply negative descriptions. Abkhazians were viewed in the Georgian collective consciousness as some kind of wild, uncivilised and uncultured people without their own ethno-cultural potential and incapable of self-development or of achieving high cultural standards. An extremely negative view was taken of the role of Abkhazians in the history of Georgia. In line with the views of certain Georgian academics, extensively popularised at the time, Abkhazians were seen as relatively recent migrants from the mountainous regions of the North-Western Caucasus who had resettled in traditional Georgian lands as the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth, in part driving out and in part assimilating the aboriginal Georgian population residing there.

The widespread idea that the Abkhazians were in general Muslims, a negative feature in the collective consciousness of Georgians, was also incorrect. The following sentence trotted out in "Svobodnaya Gruziya" by one of the most severe critics of Vladislav Ardzinba, is typical in is respect: "What more can be expected of a man who said many years ago: I am a Muslim and will

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8 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 12 January 1993.

9 *Sevodnya*, 25 January 1993.

do all I can to link myself to the Muslim world".[10] Apparently affiliation to one of the three world religions – Islam – is in itself an unworthy act, and a person desiring it is capable of only the basest acts.

In addition to the ideas that the Abkhazians were in general Muslims, they were seen as an extensively Russified people, also a completely negative feature in the collective consciousness of Georgians. The main arguments in support of the Russification of the Abkhazians are the high percentage of people (in particular when compared with Georgians) who have no command of the mother tongue but are Russophone, the absence of secondary and higher education in the Abkhazian language and political gravitation towards Russia.

The gravitation of Abkhazia towards Russia does indeed occur, and in this case it probably cannot be denied that the free bilingualism of the Abkhazians gives them a good grasp of the basic parameters of Russian culture. This naturally stimulated post-Soviet integration aspirations, and accordingly a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language meant that Georgian culture was closed to Abkhazians; other things being equal, this would always act as a factor for disintegration.

Nonetheless the principal factors in the Russian orientation of Abkhazians are historical and political, not elements of culture and everyday life, the more so because the "Russification" of the Abkhazians is no more than a myth. The reduction in the active area of the Abkhazian language did not entail erosion of the people's ethnic consciousness or a transition to Russian standards of culture and lifestyle; in that event it might have been possible to say that the Abkhazians had been Russified.

However this reality, obvious to any unbiased observer, is ignored by the Georgian side. This "Russification" of the Abkhazians is explained in Tbilisi as a conscious effort by Kremlin politicians to detach Abkhazians from Georgians, to replace the allegedly historical Georgian orientation typical of Abkhazians by a Russian orientation and in so doing secure a Russian presence in the Georgian land of Abkhazia.

This constant in the contemporary public consciousness of Georgians is part of a broader stratum of contemporary public attitudes linked with Russian-Georgian relations, their historical context and present prospects that ultimately shaped Georgians' negative views of Russia and Russians. These ideas spring from beliefs that relations with Russia have been to Georgia's detriment. Thus Georgians take the view that their country has been annexed by Russia twice – first in 1801, when the emperor Alexander I, having deposed the Bagrationi dynasty, abolished the Kartli-Kakhetian kingdom by bringing it into the administrative and territorial system of the Russian Empire, and for the second time in 1921, when the forces of Soviet Russia invaded the territory of the Georgian democratic republic, overthrew its government and put the local communists in power. The view of the history of the 70-year Soviet regime is particularly emotional. This period is seen in an exclusively negative light, as a time of social and cultural regression due to the single-minded suppression of the Georgian people's national aspirations and encroachment upon its ethnic rights.

In these circumstances the idea that the Russians have a secret dislike of Georgia dies hard. These negative tendencies in the Soviet history of Georgia referred to above are linked to the concealed Georgiophobia of the Russians, at times hating the freedom-loving Georgian people, who have tried repeatedly to cast off the shackles of the Soviet empire. Even Eduard Shevardnadze has expressed this constant feature of Georgian consciousness. In his appeal to Boris Yeltsin during

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10 "Nashi narody nevozmozhno razdelit'", Svobodnaya Gruziya, 24 March 1993.

the struggle for Sukhum accusing him of failing to help, the President of Georgia wrote: "What is our offence in the eyes of Russia and the world? Is it not that many times in the history of the Georgian people we have desired freedom and independence for ourselves?". On the whole this matches the widely held Georgian view of the "sacrificial" nature of their history, of the casualties suffered by the Georgian people during those years and of Russia's constant plots against Georgia.

It is important to recognise that on the whole the Abkhazian problem is also seen in Georgia through the prism of a Russian complex. All the difficulties in Georgian-Abkhazian relations are seen as the result of Russian intrigues. The very formation of a national Soviet state system for the Abkhazians in 1921 is regarded as part of a cunning Russian plan to weaken Georgia, to inject the germs of future separatism into its unitary state body. The birth of the Abkhazian national movement in the 1960s was not seen as independent either. The widely held view in Georgia was that Abkhazia had very favourable conditions for social, economic and cultural development as part of the Georgian SSR, not to be compared with the oppressed state of other Soviet autonomous regions, particularly in the Russian Federation. Accordingly the Abkhazians had no grounds for dissatisfaction, and the periodic Abkhazian disturbances aimed at taking Abkhazia out of Georgia were again said to be the result of Kremlin plots. G. Nodia drew attention to this feature of the Georgian social consciousness, observing that the Ossetians and the Abkhazians "were seen not as fighting for their own rights, but as siding with "them" (the Kremlin) against "us" (Georgia)".[11] The view still prevails in Georgia that all the political shocks that the republic has suffered in recent years, including the conflicts in Abkhazia (and in South Ossetia), have been inspired by some "third force", which is usually taken to mean Russia and its secret agents.

This constant feature of Georgian social consciousness was also apparent in assessing the course and results of the 1992-1993 war and its causes. It was obvious to many in Georgia from the very beginning that the war in Abkhazia had been plotted and planned in the offices of the Kremlin. Academician A. Bakradze, a very distinguished figure in contemporary Georgian culture, asserted that "we (i.e. the Georgians: author) know what a cunning plan the Russian government thought up against Georgia. It is to Russia's advantage to create a Karabakh situation in Abkhazia..."[12] The Gagry defeat of the Georgian forces provided fresh grounds for allegations of Russian involvement in the conflict. A letter from the Georgian State Council to Manfred Wörner stated that "the conspiracy between the Abkhazian separatists and reactionary forces in Russia is quite obvious".[13] Eduard Shevardnadze has repeatedly supported this position by declaring, for example, that "powerful imperialist and fundamentalist forces" were behind the Abkhazian separatists.[14] The statement by the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in exile already quoted is even more specific. It states that our neighbour, the Russian Federation, inspired the conflict and today land Georgian from time immemorial is occupied under its direct control and with the participation of its reactionary forces.[15] However, it is not quite clear what is meant by "reactionary forces", because definitions differ and they are referred to somewhat vaguely, sometimes as the Russian generals, sometimes as communist opposition circles, sometimes as a chauvinist great power and sometimes all of these.

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11 G. Nodia, "Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia", in: Bruno Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels, VUBPress, 1996, p. 84.

12 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 4 November 1992.

13 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 6 October 1992.

14 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 1 January 1993.

15 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 19 April 1997.

It is obvious that the persistent efforts to make Russia the sole culprit cloak a desire by the Georgian side to justify its defeat in the war, the more so because the Georgian public eagerly accepts this version. The general background of anti-Russian feeling in Georgia also makes this version easier to believe. However, such a position is of necessity an obstacle on the way to peaceful mutual understanding, because it reduces the possibility of the Georgians properly assessing their own role and the errors that led to an escalation in the tragic events of 1992-1993; the opportunities for a rational diplomatic strategy are reduced accordingly.

The principal issue at the present stage of negotiations is the future of political relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. The parties' views on this issue are diametrically opposed. The Georgian public consciousness is finding it difficult to adjust to the idea of a federal arrangement. Eduard Shevardnadze's former statement to the effect that Georgia is not ready for this reflects the substance of the matter very clearly. In any event, even several years ago few in Georgia could tolerate the thought that future development for Georgia was possible outside a unitary state and political organization. Thus an analysis of the programmes of Georgian political parties going to the polls in October 1992 shows that most of them saw Georgia either as a unitary state or, if the autonomous regions were allowed to exist, these should be under strict control by the central authority.

Eduard Shevardnadze's position was no less clear. When addressing parliament on 17 November 1992 he rejected the idea of federal links between Georgia and Abkhazia, declaring that the Georgian authorities were "prepared to consider only defining the legal status of the Abkhazian autonomous region".[16] According to Shevardnadze this was the only thing that the Abkhazians could rely on as part of Georgia. The tone of the debate on the agreement of 4 April 1994 in the Georgian parliament is highly symptomatic also. The agreement was severely criticised by the legislators because, in the opinion of most of them, it undermined the unitary foundations of the Georgian state, dooming it to a federal, and what is more to a confederative, system.

Meanwhile the idea of federalization as a possible way of settling the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, though not without its difficulties, is nevertheless gaining ground in Georgia. Many Georgians already understand that a classic unitary approach can hardly form a basis for the internal arrangements of the state. Georgia regards the latter as a meaningful compromise. However, it is difficult to understand how realistic outlines for a future federal union are viewed in Tbilisi.

Very highly placed Georgian public servants, including Eduard Shevardnadze, have declared repeatedly that Abkhazia would be given the widest possible powers of autonomous self-government as part of Georgia, taking into account world experience and appropriate legal standards. Abkhazia's rights to its own constitution, national emblem, flag, national anthem and so on are offered as the attributes of independence.

Certain other nuances in the Georgian position are very striking, in particular the previous statement that Georgia would give Abkhazia the same powers that Russia would grant to Chechnya. This position, stated by Eduard Shevardnadze at the height of the military action in Chechnya, reflected his belief both in a final victory by the federal centre over the forces of Chechen separatism and in a firm approach by Moscow to post-war relations between the Centre and Chechnya. For obvious reasons, the present situation in Russian-Chechen relations makes it inconvenient to refer to Chechen status as a prototype for the future legal position of Abkhazia. That is why rhetoric on this topic has disappeared from the official Georgian vocabulary.

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16 *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, 20 November 1992.

The leaders of Abkhazia have already cast off the romanticism of the first few months after the victory, when Sukhum was counting on final separation from Georgia, complete independence and international legal status. Today Abkhazia has been forced to agree to the possibility of coexistence with Georgia as part of a kind of unified (common) state, which will thus restore the Soviet frontiers of the Georgian SSR.

At the same time the model for the internal state system proposed in Tbilisi will not be accepted in Abkhazia, in particular any versions whereby Abkhazia joins Georgia as an autonomous entity but an administrative tie is retained in relations between Sukhum and Tbilisi. Promises that Abkhazia will be granted extensive autonomous rights, including the right to a constitu-tion, an anthem, an emblem, a flag and so on sound like no more than empty words, especially in the light of the historical parallels: during the previous autonomous period as part of Georgia the Abkhazians already had most of the attributes in the list, but this did not save Georgian-Abkhazian relations from difficulties and conflicts. In addition, they are convinced in Abkhazia that the Tbilisi government will never implement the promised "extensive rights" in practice. However, above all the view in Sukhum is that the Georgian proposals do not take today's realities into account, in particular the war and its results.

In the end Abkhazia is prepared to build its relationships with Georgia within the framework of a union state only on the basis of equality, and the view in Sukhum is that this principle should be the foundation of the future state system. Accordingly Sukhum is refusing to grant Tbilisi any exclusive powers, agreeing only on joint jurisdiction in such areas as foreign policy, defence, finance, the frontier and customs service and some others.

The diplomatic activity in the summer of 1997, culminating in the sensational meeting in Tbilisi on 14 August between Eduard Shevardnadze and Vladislav Ardzinba, gave rise to hopes of an important breakthrough on the way to a peaceful settlement of the conflict. However, these hopes proved to be unjustified. Both sides suspended the movement that had just begun and the Russian mediator, who had embarked upon his task so eagerly and purposefully, unexpectedly withdrew into the shadows and the negotiating process reverted to its usual sluggish state. On the whole the diplomatic commotion in the summer did more harm than good; not only did it end inconclusively, it also gave the parties fresh grounds for distrusting each other. Now much greater diplomatic efforts, or some extraordinary event forcing them into realistic arrangements, are needed before Shevardnadze and Ardzinba can meet again at the negotiating table. As a result the parties' positions have remained substantially unchanged, and in particular Tbilisi has again attempted to intensify its activities along the lines already approved. Thus Shevardnadze again observed, at the meeting of heads of CIS countries in October 1997 in Kishinev, that Russia's peacekeeping efforts were ineffective and called upon President Yeltsin to step up blockade sanctions against Abkhazia and to take more decisive action to ensure the return of Georgian refugees.

Russia's peacekeeping strategy is certainly in need of modification, because at present it is extremely ambiguous. While today the Russian peacekeeping contingent on the River Ingur is the sole guarantee that military action will not be renewed on the line of Georgian-Abkhazian confrontation, the blockade sanctions against Abkhazia applied by the frontier forces on the other frontier on the River Psou serve to fuel the smouldering conflict, because it is obvious that a blockade is one of the most effective measures in the arsenal of war, but not of peace.

Meanwhile Russia's peacekeeping potential can show itself, not in trying to suffocate one of the parties to the conflict by a blockade and not by attempts to impose a particular peace agreement on the parties, but by guiding Tbilisi and Sukhum to a direct, independent and unassisted dialogue with each other. Of course, appropriate conditions must be created for this, and the first

step should be the complete lifting of the blockade on Abkhazia without reservations and with no preconditions. There can be no normal dialogue while one party to the conflict is awaiting the final suffocation of the other, and the latter is preparing itself for a fresh tightening of blockade sanctions against it or a possible invasion from across the river. However, as soon as the parties understand that from now on they themselves have to solve their problems, together, without looking to third forces for help or hostility, when clearly the machinery for achieving peace must be commensurate with their own resources and capabilities, they will be able to demonstrate political will and begin a realistic search for the road to peace.

Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi

The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict in a Regional Context

In March 1996 a meeting of Georgian and Abkhaz intellectuals was organized in Moscow. In the ensuing common declaration, signed among others by Yuri Anchabadze, one of the co-editors of this volume, several ideas were put forward, with which I would fully agree:

"It is of no use to accuse one another, trying to find out who actually started the violence (...) Dialogue should be sought instead."

"Prior to discussing the issue of the future legal status of Abkhazia, it is necessary to develop a system of social and political guarantees that can secure peace in Abkhazia and a just settlement of the conflict."

"It is necessary to secure the return of all refugees to Abkhazia."

Unfortunately, mutual accusations and the abuse of tendentiously selected historic factography to prove a particular viewpoint still remain typical of the Abkhazian-Georgian dialogue. The reader of this volume may judge if its contributors have succeeded in escaping this form of unproductive polemics.

The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict from a Comparative Regional Perspective

The post-cold war world, with its numerous conflicts emerging against the background of competing globalization and de-globalization trends, is confronted with the problem of how to reduce intra-regional confrontation and promote a co-operative model. It is therefore necessary to develop precise definitions, criteria and indicators for determining the nature, role and influence of the main factors contributing both to conflicts and to effective co-operation.

Widespread inter-ethnic confrontation and conflict are relatively new phenomena in the former Soviet Union. Governments are experiencing difficulty in maintaining the forms of co-existence that were customary in the Soviet past and in designing strategies to facilitate co-existence and co-operation. There is no guarantee that the political support and commitment needed to formulate and follow a sustainable strategy will be forthcoming. In a situation in which the national and international institutions that should take responsibility for co-ordinating the regional co-operation process are not working properly, or are even absent, it is essential to build partnerships, devise flexible strategies and build a consensus around co-operation priorities.

Since the end of the 1980s, ethno-territorial conflicts have become the most noticeable aspect of the new political reality in the Caucasus, ruining stability, development prospects and even elementary economic self-sufficiency. There are five zones where wars and mass violence have erupted in the region during this period: Karabakh, Tskhinvali (South Ossetia), Abkhazia, Ossetia-Ingushetia and Chechnya.

The high concentration of conflicts in the Caucasus is often ascribed to the Russian secret service, to military or political forces fomenting antagonism, or to the particular cultures of the peoples inhabiting this region, supposedly characterized by intolerance and aggressiveness. All three explanations are unsatisfactory. The inability of ethnic groups to coexist should be seen as the result of failed institutional regulations rather than inborn qualities or geopolitical factors. This

does not mean that an analysis of the roots of conflict in the Caucasus should overlook the role of external manipulation (the "hidden hand" factor) or its relation to (specific) internal "spontaneous" players in the region. It is not easy to determine to what extent an analysis of the conflicts may show them to be due to primarily intrinsic, spontaneous causes or, on the contrary, the result of deliberate external decisions, in particular in a situation where there are no empirical data on the genesis of the conflicts. It is also of the utmost importance to identify the real interests of the opposing population groups, interests which differ both from the declared goals and from the particular interests of the political élites. Nor should the specific nature of the Caucasian context be either underestimated or overestimated, in particular Caucasian cultural traditions and the geostrategic importance of the region. Some aspects of the Caucasian context, which are worth considering separately, are presented below.

Territorial Factor, Boundaries and Geography

All conflicts, as they involve an attempt to change the political status of a particular territory, are essentially territorial in nature. All Caucasian conflicts are – in more up-to-date terminology – sovereignty conflicts. The sacred value ascribed to territory and homeland can be observed world-wide, but has particular consequences in the Caucasus, with its extremely diversified population, its vague notion of ethnic rights on a particular territory, and the persistence of the Soviet legacy (including the legacy of arbitrarily drawn borders, of forced migrations and of the myth of the titular nation). In such circumstances, conflicts on boundaries and territories tend to be rather explosive.

The availability of an external border and access to other states or areas populated by ethnically proximate people, or having an outlet to the sea, is of the utmost importance to the Caucasian peoples. It was no coincidence that one of the most sensitive aspects of the Karabakh problem was the absence of any such external border (hence the claim on the Lachin corridor). Likewise, it was significant that the Confederation of the Caucasian Peoples[1] chose Sukhumi as its capital, due to its seaside location. Russia too perceives an outlet to the sea as a very sensitive issue, especially since the dramatic shrinking of its Black Sea coastline. In so far as all the conflicts in the Caucasus are, in one way or another, linked to the traumatic loss of imperial power by Russia, this Russian perception has great importance for the region as a whole.

Russia and the Question of External Manipulation

Many analysts, especially those from the region itself, tend to ascribe all problems and deficiencies in the policies of Caucasian governments and movements to the "Russian factor". A critique of this position does not mean that this factor should be underestimated. Russia is indeed actively involved in all the conflicts here, not only through its peace-keepers or paratroopers, but also through the arms trade (it sells weaponry to all sides in a conflict, though it is selective as to quality and quantity), through manipulative activities involving economic levers, or through the activities of its military and intelligence services. As Olivier Roy writes: "In the early 1990s Moscow had actively encouraged conflicts in the Caucasus while presenting itself as an honest

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[1] The Confederation of Caucasian Peoples (initially the Confederation of Mountainous Peoples of the Caucasus) is a loose association of national movements which claim to represent most of the North-Caucasian nations. It was created just before the break-up of the Soviet Union and was actively involved in all the conflicts apart from Karabakh. It has been dominated by the Abkhaz, the Adyghes and the Chechens.

broker between the combatants."[2] As a rule, Russian policies are inconsistent and contradictory, but they possess incomparably greater resources than any of the local forces. All conflicts in the Caucasus are connected with the presence of Russian troops, whether these are actively participating (Chechnya, Abkhazia), performing the role of peace-keepers (Ossetia, Abkhazia), or acting as trainers and advisors (Karabakh). Greater sympathy among the Russian military and political establishments for one of the fighting sides is apparent in each of these conflicts (the retreat from Chechnya and the absence of peace-keepers in Karabakh constitute exceptions in this respect).

The North Caucasians well remember the 1991 visit by the Russian President Boris Yeltsin to the region, when he promised the Ingush assistance in the conflict with the Ossetians concerning the Prigorodny district, and when, in a second speech, he promised the Ossetians to defend them against Ingush ambitions. Not only did the very creation of the Ingush republic (without even delimiting its borders) contravene the Russian Constitution, but it was seemingly designed specifically by one of the interest groups in power to be a source of permanent tension, although hardly beneficial to Russian national interests. Such a prevalence of short-term group or individual interests over long-term strategic interests, although not unfamiliar elsewhere, dominates the political scene in the post-Soviet world. In the case of Russia, this contradiction is even more complicated by post-imperial nostalgia. Another specific illustration of Russian inconsistencies and contradictory policies was the arrest, in the early stages of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, of the leader of the Confederation of the Mountainous Peoples of the Caucasus, Musa Shanibov, a former professor of Scientific Communism – allegedly for organizing military and terrorist activities on Georgian territory. The attempt to repress the Confederation turned this little-known local politician into a popular regional figure; there were certain signs (such as the clumsy way in which he was arrested and then released) that these consequences were calculated in advance, even if counter-productive to other policies.

On the one hand, the Chechen war demonstrated the possibility of successful opposition to the Russian state machinery, and hence served as an example to radical separatists; on the other, however, it demonstrated the readiness of the Russian State to deploy immense resources to suppress such separatist movements by force. In the consciousness of the Caucasian people, Chechnya pointed to the real anti-Caucasian aggressors, and shifted previously anti-Georgian sentiments northwards. At the same time, many Georgian politicians hoped that the Chechen war would lead to a change in the Russian attitude towards the Abkhazian problem. But Russia's unwillingness or inability to resolve the Abkhaz conflict betrayed these hopes.

The Russian policy towards one or other of the ethnic groups is also a very important factor. With the exception of the Chechens, who were themselves involved in a war with Russia, all the parties involved in the Caucasian conflicts tried to solicit Russia's support, usually appealing to that country as an arbiter. Such an appeal aimed to enforce their own position in the conflict or in its settlement. Political support to Russia or to the Russian government, in the form of electoral support (for instance in North Ossetia and Ingushetia) or in the form of military bases (for instance from the Georgian side in the Abkhazian conflict), are offered in exchange for a favourable attitude from the arbiter. Such political calculations by the local élites reflect their lack of confidence in their own power. By appealing to an external arbiter they are showing their lack of any sense of responsibility for the conflicts in which they are involved. Their appeal for Russian support also shows that they overestimate Russia's potential to solve the conflicts in the Caucasus. Russia is still perceived as an external arbiter, a father-figure, whose force is decisive

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[2] Olivier Roy, 'Crude manoeuvres', *Index on Censorship,* 4, 1997, p. 148.

in the final outcome of this game. Although it could initially have played a decisive role in these conflicts, it now seems, however, to be not only unwilling but also unable to resolve them.

Demographic Balance

All the conflicts are characterized by radical demographic changes in the period before the eruption of the conflict (peaceful migration, forced deportations under Stalin) and during the conflict itself (refugees, ethnic cleansing). These demographic changes lead to perceptions of a threat and an acute sense of insecurity. An ethnic group – or its élites – may fear that a weakening of its demographic position could, in the long run, radically alter the balance of power and the redistribution of available resources to its disadvantage. Such perceptions, even if they are not confirmed by the use of force by the party whose increasing demographic potential is feared, may lead to "preventive action" and hence to violent conflict.

Demography is an important, sometimes even a decisive, issue in the effort by the traditional political élites to preserve their privileged position by increasing the "weight" of their respective ethnic group. The case of the Western Caucasian peoples – who experienced severe demographic losses after the end of the great Caucasian War in 1864, when Muslims from the Caucasus were either expelled by force or voluntarily emigrated to Turkey – is notable in this respect. The Abkhazian leadership, for instance, is attempting to attract members of their own diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East to return and repopulate the country.

Patterns in Argumentation on Territorial Claims and Popular Myths

The Soviet heritage – including the loose definition of the borders between federal units, the arbitrary attribution of territorial and political status to the so-called titular nations and the Stalinist ideological tradition on the nationality question (definition of "nationality", hierarchical distinction between "people" and "ethnos", etc.) – is present in all the conflicts. Symbolic acts and statements as well as all sorts of national myths are inflated in the first stage of the conflicts, while the present stage is characterized by the gradually diminishing significance of these symbolic acts, statements and myths. All parties in the conflict had and have a pragmatic – some may even say cynical – approach to universal democratic norms and international law, appealing to those norms and provisions that they find useful for themselves and ignoring others. Double standards are commonplace. As Tim Potier stated recently: "The government and people of Georgia should not be blamed for 'claiming' what international law says is rightfully theirs. If the Abkhaz were in their position, they would be doing exactly the same."[3]

The demand for exclusive rights to a specific territory by one ethnic group or another is often linked to the demand for "autochthonous" status, while only "guest" status is attributed to other groups. Such claims are generally based on an arbitrary use of historical facts. Some Georgian scholars have argued, for instance, that the Abkhazians came to Abkhazia from the North Caucasian mountains only recently. This, it is argued, is proved by the lack of an Abkhazian word for "sea". The Abkhazian scientists in turn have selected other arguments from the scant historical information available to argue that, on the contrary, it is the Georgians who should be regarded as newcomers to a region that was part of the Abkhazian Kingdom in the Middle Ages. In the same vein, Armenians claim historical rights to Karabakh, although most sources show that the

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3 Tim Potier, *The Constitutional Future of the Post-Soviet Caucasian Autonomous Republics*, Briefing Paper, unpublished.

Caucasian Albanians inhabited the region. Azeri sources claim that most of the Armenians in this region are descendants of the Armenian migrants from Iran and Turkey who came to Karabakh during the 19th century, after the Russian military victories. The Azeris claim to be the descendants and heirs of the Christian Albanian population, and thus the real autochthonous inhabitants of Karabakh.

Some political claims are easier to substantiate with historical facts than others. Thus it is easily proved that there were next to no Ossetians among the population of Tskhinvali until the 1920s, or that the Ingush actually did inhabit the right bank of the Terek river before their forced deportation to Central Asia at the end of the second world war, when the territory was offered to the Ossetians (supposedly more loyal to the Soviet regime). In cases like these, the opposing party may indeed find it difficult to substantiate its political claims using historical material. The legitimacy of the whole argument based on the difference between autochthonous and immigrant peoples may also be rejected by such a party, which then tries to legitimize its political claims by a relatively more recent historic past, for example, along the following lines: "Those who are currently occupying a territory should have all the rights to it" – as in the case of the Magyars who settled in Hungary some centuries ago, or the Turks, who have occupied Constantinople since the 15th century. In both types of legitimization, history is manipulated for political reasons. The impact of such historical arguments on the public consciousness of all the ethnic groups living in the Caucasus is a strong a strong factor in the generation of conflicts.

A vaguely defined right to self-determination is the main argument in all the disputes mentioned above, with the sole exception of the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. In the case of Abkhazia, this right conflicts with the democratic principle of majority rule, but in South Ossetia, where the Ossetians constitute a majority, it does not. This is yet another demonstration of the instrumental use of historical, demographic and legal arguments in various conflicts.

Different Levels of Ethnic Identity and Religion

Different levels may be distinguished in the ethnic self-identification of the Caucasian peoples. The Ingush and the Chechens consider that they have very distinct identities, but at the same time they stress their ethnic affinity (their languages belong to the Vainakh, or Nakh, group). They also regard themselves as Caucasians, and are ready in some cases to prove this latter identity by political or even military action. Likewise, the Abkhazians and the Circassians set great store by their ethnic proximity, as well as their Caucasian identity. The barbaric neologism currently popular in Russia, "a person of Caucasian nationality" – which reflects the general repressive, anti-Caucasian mood in that country – effectively strengthens this common identity.

Peoples who speak Turkic and Indo-European languages also have to define their place within the framework of this common Caucasian identity. Not only peoples like the above-mentioned Circassians, but also Balkars, Ossetians and Kumyks should be taken into account. These, however, are far less active in the pan-Caucasian integration processes (e.g. in the Confederation of Mountainous Peoples of the Caucasus).

Another feature peculiar to the conflicts mentioned above is that they all take place between groups belonging to markedly different linguistic families (Slavic Russians/Kartvelian Georgians/Iranian Ossetians/Turkic Azeris/Vainakh Ingush and Chechens, Abkhazians of the Adygho-Abkhaz group, and Armenians). Linguistically related ethnic groups support each other, as in the case of the Ingush and Chechens, or the Abkhaz and Adyghes. This is one of the reasons why ethnogenetic theories and myths play a much greater role in the Caucasus, while the religious

factor is secondary, contrary to places like the former Yugoslavia where the ethnic conflicts take place between groups that are closely related linguistically but are denominationally distinct.

The role of the religious factor in the Caucasian conflicts is commonly overestimated. Although in some cases (e.g. Chechnya, with its strong Islamic networks) religion may play a significant role, local political élites generally display a rather pragmatic manipulative attitude towards it. After his return to Georgia, Shevardnadze lost no time in getting baptized – by the more Orthodox name of Giorgi. The Abkhaz president Ardzinba promised to build a mosque in order to placate the religious feelings of his more devoted Muslim Abkhazian compatriots in Turkey. The population, meanwhile, has to a great extent lost its initial interest in religious ceremonies, revived after perestroika. Religious symbols may, however, become more powerful during a prolonged military action against opponents of a different religious creed. This happened in Chechnya, where there is a still significant Sufi tradition and where the historical memory of the 19th century *jihad* against the Russians is still very much alive. Now many Chechens support the introduction of *shariat* principles into penitentiary practice, though they may often be unable to demonstrate a basic knowledge of its fundamental principles.

Economic Factors

The economic interests of Russian and Caucasian states and the volume of resources that they are ready to deploy in order to achieve particular political goals need to be assessed in detail. Among these, the economic interests and resources of various élites and groups – such as the arms and drug dealers, oil companies and multinationals – have to be taken into account, together with the economic significance of decisions taken by the state administration. All these factors imply significant capital flows. The war in Chechnya has enriched some of the military, while the resources allocated to the rehabilitation of the economy have fed those economic players who were able to control this decision politically. Pipeline policies and the future redistribution of the oil-generated profits is a dominant factor in the Russian policies in Karabakh and Chechnya, and may play an increasingly important role in the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict. Russia seems to be persisting in its manipulation of ethno-territorial conflicts in order to secure its strategic economic (oil) interests.

The Time Perspective, Concepts of the Future and the Basic Interests of the Population

None of the opposing sides has any feasible, realistic proposal, which may be considered a sound basis for conflict settlement, to offer the other side. Russia has no compromise to offer either, and until recently seemed not to be interested in sustainable settlements. In most cases a conflict is seen as a zero-sum game, in which the perception of both the possible negative consequences of certain factors or events for the interests of each party (in particular as regards the demographic balance between different populations on the disputed territory, or the overall balance of power), as well as possible positive consequences for the interests of the opposing party in the conflict, are largely exaggerated.

A population's safety, prosperity and participation in governance could be described as its basic needs. This is quite a simple definition. It is, however, not easy to discuss the means of securing such basic needs. So in the case of Georgian refugees from Abkhazia, for instance, it is evident that there is no rapid solution leading to their return – to northern Abkhazia in particular – that would give them sufficient security guarantees and at the same time ensure democratic governance in Abkhazia. Only a more complex, stage by stage process can lead to a compromise

acceptable to both sides. As in many other cases of conflict between "formal" democracy and "ethnic" demography, the only possible solution – albeit a slow one – involves a basic democratization process accompanied by very cautious demographic policies, linked to complete procedural transparency and an ongoing process of negotiation.

New Trend in Georgia's Political Orientation

The failure of the assassination attempt on Eduard Shevardnadze in 1995 led to new geopolitical initiatives and trends in the Caucasus. Igor Giorgadze, the Georgian State Security Minister and son of the leader of the Communist party – the main rival of Shevardnadze's Union of Citizens – escaped to Moscow on a Russian military plane, after having been accused of masterminding the assassination attempt. Shevardnadze exploited to the full this opportunity to get rid of the strongmen dominating the political scene. He scored a clear-cut political victory over all his rivals. But even more important was the reorientation of the country towards the West rather than towards Russia.

Despite the Russian military bases in Georgia, the presence of Russian border guards at the Georgian border with Turkey and Russian peace-keepers in the two zones of conflict (Tskhinvali and Abkhazia), this reorientation of foreign policy became evident at the end of 1996. It was encouraged by Russian failures in Chechnya and the change in Western attitudes to the region. The latter were caused not only by the immensely important factor of Caspian oil, but also by the general shift in Western priorities after the partial resolution of the Bosnian crisis and the general disappointment in Russia's democratization process, revealed most explicitly by the acceleration of the NATO enlargement to the East.

The doubling of Western investments in the Georgian economy during the last two months of 1996 reflected the emergence of a new situation. The rising power of the West in the region – at least in the minds of the Georgian people – contrasts with the waning power of Russia. Russia is tempted to use the CIS in order to re-establish its control over former Soviet republics, but it avoids too strong an integration, fearing an influx of non-Slavic people into Russia – fears heightened by a lower birth rate among the Slavic population than among Muslim minorities. It is confronted by catastrophically diminishing resources and organizational abilities. Georgian public opinion perceives Russian policies – in particular the policy of "divide and rule" – as being a serious threat to the country's security. The potential economic or strategic benefit of any Georgian-Russian co-operation is seen as far less important than this type of threat.

Although the visit by the NATO Secretary-General, Solana, to the southern states of the CIS sparked a harsh reaction from some Moscow politicians, it may to an extent be considered merely symbolic – in line with the still prevailing tendency to substitute demonstrative actions for real policies towards the NIS. It may also be seen as an expression of the change in balance of forces involved in the region. In his speech delivered on 11 February 1997, in Tbilisi, Mr. Solana stressed the new role of Georgia and the Caucasus:

> My visit today should be understood as a sign of the value that we at NATO attach to our relationship with Georgia. We want to continue and deepen that relationship. Indeed, the opportunities for co-operation with NATO are almost endless. On NATO's side, we would enthusiastically welcome the growing involvement of Georgia across the whole range of our co-operation programmes. Georgia's geographical position may be far from Brussels, but its concerns and interests are far from remote. The Caucasus is an important region for Europe, and there is great social and economic potential to be realized, once underlying security issues have been resolved peacefully and in accordance with OSCE values and commitments. Europe cannot be fully secure, or realize its own full potential, if the Caucasus countries are left out of the European security equation.[4]

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[4] *Human Development Report: Georgia 1997*, UNDP, Tbilisi, 1997, p. 30.

The emergence of close co-operation between Ukraine and Azerbaijan, believed to be brokered by Shevardnadze, indicates that forms of integration of CIS countries that are not Moscow-centred have some chance of success. This alliance, with implicit Turkish participation, is a distinct alternative to the traditional CIS process of regionalism which failed to go beyond declamatory policies or to substantiate Russia's aspiration to be a superpower. The issues at stake in Azeri-Georgian-Ukrainian co-operation are obvious: a way of counterbalancing Russia's dominance, in particular in relation to the energy and economic security of the participating states.

An activation of Turkish-Georgian relations followed this process. On 28 February 1997, a delegation of Turkish Mejlis visited Georgia. The head of the delegation, Mr. Hatin-oglu, stressed Turkey's interest in facilitating the peaceful settlement of the Abkhazian problem, categorically supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and emphasising Turkey's desire to oppose the Russian scenario there. President Shevardnadze expressed his agreement with the Turkish viewpoint: "I think it is time for more active Turkish participation in the settlement of the Abkhaz conflict and other conflicts in the Caucasian region". He also stressed the importance of the new railway linking Turkey with Georgia.[5]

On 15 March, Georgian Defence Minister Nadibaidze was sent by Shevardnadze on a personal assignment to the Ingush capital Nazran. This was one of the steps in implementing the "Peaceful Caucasus Initiative", promoted by Shevardnadze since the 1996 meeting with Yeltsin and other Caucasian leaders in Kislovodsk. In Nazran, Nadibaidze met the Ingush President Aushev and the Chechen leader Maskhadov. Nadibaidze reported that both North-Caucasian leaders had supported the Peaceful Caucasus Initiative and had expressed their readiness for more active co-operation. They had both allegedly agreed that Abkhazia should remain part of Georgia, and acknowledged that the Chechen participation in the Georgian-Abkhaz war had been a mistake, Dudaev's mistake. Aushev and Maskhadov called the deployment of Russian border troops on the border between Georgia and the North Caucasus superfluous, while Nadibaidze stated that Georgia was opposed to the deployment of Russian troops on the Georgian side of their common border.[6]

The next important event with strong internal implications for Georgian foreign policy was the meeting of the CIS leaders in Moscow, on 28 March 1997. Georgia was seeking progress with the deadlocked Abkhazian problem, and hoped to achieve several goals, among them the re-deployment of Russian peace-keepers in an extended security zone in the Gali region, which would facilitate the return of some 100,000 Georgian refugees to this district. Such a return would significantly relieve the domestic political and economic strain of the refugee question. In Moscow, the Georgian side received symbolic support for its perception of the conflict, which was expressed in the Resolution of the Council of Heads of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Moscow, 28 March 1997) on the Development of the Conflict Resolution Process in Abkhazia, Georgia:

"The Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States, recalling the Declaration of the Lisbon summit of the Heads of the OSCE member states (December 1996) that condemns "ethnic cleansing, resulting in the mass extermination and forcible expulsion of the predominantly Georgian population of Abkhazia", as well as "actions hindering the return of refugees and displaced persons", condemned in its turn "the position of the Abkhazian side, hindering the

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5 "Rezonansi" newspaper, 4 March 1997; Electronic Bulletin of the US Embassy in Georgia "Recent political Developments in Georgia", no. 5, 14 March 1997 (http://www.sanet.ge/usis/usistbl.html).

6 Itartass of 15 March, "Akhali Taoba" newspaper of 17 March, "Rezonansi" newspaper of 17 March 1997.

reaching of agreements on the political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and the return, in safety and dignity, of refugees and displaced persons to the places of their permanent residence..."[7]

In a sense, the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict has been one of the most powerful of the factors that mobilized opposition among Georgians to dependence on Russia. Especially in the long term, it has had a decisive influence on the determination of foreign policy priorities. Russia seems to have lost substantial political resources through this conflict by reinforcing an anti-Russian attitude in public opinion and among the political establishment in Georgia. At the same time, Georgia's pro-Western orientation may lead to exaggerated expectations of Western support – the West may very well sacrifice the interests of small nations for the sake of stability in the Eurasian heartland. The Georgian government was particularly concerned about the possibility that Russia's consent to the eastward expansion of NATO would be obtained in exchange for American agreement to Russian influence in the Caucasus.

The Abkhazians, who were used for a long time as Russia's strongest lever of influence on Georgia, also seem more and more reluctant to be used in this way by Moscow. The Abkhazian and Georgian sides are already trying to start negotiating with each other without mediators. It is astonishing to observe how, already, the first meetings between the leaders of the two sides have been able to change the post-war stereotypes and enemy images among their respective populations, who have suddenly discovered that reality has other colours besides just black and white. Georgians were surprised to hear rational – if unacceptable – arguments from Ardzinba and other Abkhaz representatives, after several years of an exclusively negative perception of the Abkhaz leadership.

Conflict in Abkhazia: Specific Dimensions

The Abkhazian population has suffered great losses in the last two centuries as a result of deportation and the artificial in-migration of other ethnic groups to its homeland. At the same time, the Soviet legacy included ingenious arrangements for maintaining the disproportionately large share of leadership offices held by the Abkhaz community. This legacy contributed to the conflagration and determined the form it would take. Specific factors which had a decisive influence on the outbreak of the war include the North Caucasian diaspora in the Near East, different evaluations of the legal aspects of the conflict (such as the right to self-determination versus the territorial integrity principle), the perception by both parties to the conflict of the righteousness of their actions, the role of regional and international organizations, the role of Cossacks in the conflict and the importance of the Russian language in Abkhazia.

Post-Conflict Attitudes and Lack of Information

The general atmosphere in Abkhazia still bears a number of immediate post-war characteristics. The population expects war to break out anew sooner or later, and consequently much discussion and public discourse concerns the prospect of the renewal of military operations. This keeps the population militarily mobilized and constitutes the strongest obstacle to constructive, development-oriented thinking, as well as to the building of civil society. In most parts of Georgia, however, the issue of Abkhazia shifted long ago to the periphery of political discussions.

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[7] "Sakartvelos Respublika" of 29 March 1997; Electronic Bulletin of the US Embassy in Georgia "Recent Political Developments in Georgia", no. 7, 11 April 1997.

In spite of state propaganda, and the continual attempts by the political groups representing, or claiming to represent, the refugees (Internally Displaced Persons – IDPs) from Abkhazia, the problems of day-to-day survival or business interests preoccupy the general public far more than the prospect of war in Abkhazia. Apart from a few militants, mostly among the IDPs, the population would rather support a peaceful solution to the Abkhazian problem, although for the majority any solution that involved losing Abkhazia would be unacceptable.

Legal Status

Most debates today revolve around the legal status of Abkhazia within/vis-ŕ-vis Georgia. I doubt whether it is possible – or even very important – to resolve the question of political status in the short term. Problems other than status have to be resolved in order to reduce tension. But both sides' concerns and interests in the discussion on political status have to be properly analysed if there is to be a productive dialogue. The Abkhaz are concerned with how they will maintain control and who will guarantee their security after they have become a minority again, which will happen if the IDPs are allowed to return and take part in the political process through democratic procedures. The Abkhaz, who have won the war and – for the first time in a century – now have a favourable demographic percentage, have great difficulty in facing such prospects.

The Abkhaz side insists on equal (confederative) status with Georgia, which is unacceptable to Tbilisi. In February 1996 the Abkhaz proposed to set up a federal union with Georgia. According to Anri Jergenia, the Abkhaz "President's" special envoy, these proposals contained "elements of both a federation and a confederation". The new arrangement would include common national borders, joint activities in specific spheres and the possibility of setting up joint authorities. According to the protocol, each of the two equal sides would keep its constitution and relations between them would be regulated by a special treaty which, with the agreement of both sides, could have the force of constitutional law. Both sides would co-ordinate their foreign policies and foreign economic relations, the operation of border and customs services, power engineering, transport and communications, the environment and the guaranteeing of human and civic rights and freedoms, as well as the rights of ethnic minorities. The protocol implied that, by mutual agreement, Georgia and Abkhazia could increase the number of "co-ordinated policies".[8]

"President" Ardzinba noted that the new structure would not amount to a "classical type of federation". One should bear in mind that the Abkhaz side regards the above proposals as a compromise. According to Vladislav Ardzinba (and this is also maintained by many experts), the vast majority of the current population of Abkhazia would, in virtually every circumstance, seek closer relations with Russia than with Georgia, and Abkhazia would ideally prefer to join a Russian Federation than any Georgian equivalent.

During his inauguration speech as Georgian President (26 November 1995), Eduard Shevardnadze declared:

> We have always stated, and we are stating now, that time has determined that Georgia's state structure be shaped on a federal basis. Abkhazia will be a subject of the federation in Georgia with broad political status. It will have its own constitution, which will have to be in conformity with the constitution of a single united state. The Republic of Abkhazia will have its own parliament, supreme court, anthem, state emblem and other features of a state.[9]

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8 Potier, Tim, *op.cit*.

9 *Ibid.*

In 1997, notwithstanding the more active position adopted by the UN with regard to the resolution of the conflict, the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiations reached a deadlock, despite the fact that any further delay is detrimental to all parties. The absence of a clearly formulated and widely supported strategy for the resolution of ethno-territorial conflicts is still a problem. The general unwillingness to decentralize power in Georgia proper, as well as an extremely cautious attitude towards the repatriation of the Meskhetians (Meskhetian Turks), are causing increased suspicion among the negotiating partners as to the sincerity of the liberal and federalist statements made by the Georgian government, and have led to accusations of a double standard.

Among the various options for the future status of Abkhazia that are being discussed – whether it should join Russia, Georgia or a Caucasian Confederation, or stay totally independent – for the time being there does not seem to be any alternative to finding some sort of compromise with the Tbilisi government, even if other options would be preferable to the vast majority of ethnic Abkhaz. There are unfortunately no signs that both sides are actually looking for specific arrangements in a constructive way (contrary to all their rhetoric about doing so). Russia's attitude reduces still further the chances of finding this kind of solution: its post-war policy on Chechnya demonstrates that it is ready to deploy its still formidable resources to maintain control over the North Caucasus, and it still seems to believe that a compromise that is mutually acceptable to the Georgians and the Abkhaz would not be beneficial for Russian control over the region. Russia is, however, unlikely to decide to incorporate Abkhazia formally, while it may be ready to assist it in maintaining its *de facto* independence for quite a long time.

For the Abkhaz, the issue of status used to be a pretext for blocking negotiations and thereby preventing the return of the IDPs/refugees, which could have endangered the demographic balance that emerged after the war. For the Georgians, the negotiation process was only a means of demonstrating their good intentions and readiness to solve the conflict on internationally favoured terms, while there was no real will to seek a compromise. Despite their rhetoric, neither side really wanted to get to the heart of the matter and solve the problem of legal status, preferring – if no explicit gain was possible immediately – to wait until better bargaining positions were secured.

The only alternatives to a compromise between Tbilisi and Sukhumi are either military action, which would be detrimental to all and seems to be less probable, except perhaps on a limited scale (e.g. in Gali or the Kodori valley), or a further stalling of the negotiations – "neither peace nor war". This last scenario seemed to be the one preferred by all parties for several years, but it has now ceased to be so, in so far as both governments are beginning to lose control over the situation – a clear trend in 1997.

Moreover, the deadlock in the negotiations is becoming more and more damaging to both parties. Finally, it could be argued that the opinion quoted in the document presented at the beginning of this chapter – that the final determination of the legal status should not be a precondition for any other progress in the peace process – makes a good deal of sense. Postponing such a solution until a time when the sides have a better basis for mutual understanding, designing provisional status on the basis of functional needs and approaches, and proceeding in the meantime with other important issues, is a viewpoint I would fully support.

Georgian Refugees/IDPs and the Gali Region

The Abkhaz side uses two main arguments to counter the Georgian demand for the refugees to return soon to Abkhazia. According to the Sochi protocols of April 1994,[10] any Georgians who took part in military action should be prohibited from returning – economic difficulties and the risk of spontaneous violence are used as a second argument against their return. Neither of these arguments is convincing. The first is incompatible with any respected legal tradition: of course, war criminals should be prosecuted notwithstanding their ethnic origin, but to instigate proceedings against all those who have carried weapons is a very different matter. It is not only unfair, as people should not be prosecuted for taking one side or another in a civil war, it is also technically impossible to have independent legal bodies check the behaviour of the entire Georgian population during the war. The argument that the economic situation is unfavourable is not a very strong one either: technical and financial terms can be agreed by both parties in order to make the return of the IDPs possible. Neither of the two arguments can be invoked in relation to the return of refugees to the Gali region, which has a homogeneous Georgian population and where the return of IDPs is already an irreversible process. According to various estimates, the number of Georgians in Gali is about as high as the number of Abkhaz in Abkhazia (the latter number continues to decrease, creating a further imbalance).

Although the Gali region has been owned alternately over the centuries by Megrelian/ Georgian and Abkhazian feudal lords, it has had almost no Abkhazian population in the 20th century. Whatever arguments the Abkhaz use regarding the Georgian presence in their homeland, there is no historical or other legitimization for discriminatory policies towards the Georgian population in this region. Nor would such policies receive any support from Abkhazia's North Caucasian allies. Abkhaz officials will therefore have great difficulty in coping with any eruptions of violence in Gali.

The possibility of returning the Gali region to Georgian control, in exchange for peace and an acceptable political status, was discussed among the Abkhaz leadership. The opportunity for such an exchange has been lost, however, as the Georgian government no longer has to negotiate the future of Gali on the same terms as before – it just needs to wait for a more opportune moment. An attempt to create a separate Megrel nationality (out of a linguistically distinct Georgian sub-ethnic group) as a strategic alternative, which is proposed and strongly supported by a British scholar, George Hewitt, and is being implemented in practice by the Abkhaz leadership, has come too late, as the majority of the IDPs (predominantly Megrelians) have strengthened their Georgian identity after their exodus from Abkhazia.

Specific measures concerning the Georgian IDPs and people who went missing during the war could promote dialogue between Georgians and Abkhaz. A moratorium on changing the property rights of the IDPs and refugees from Abkhazia – which would in fact mean unilaterally depriving them of their property left behind in Abkhazia, until the achievement of a final solution or a special agreement – could be reciprocated on the Georgian side by long-term commitments regarding the economic development of Abkhazia. The mutual exchange of data concerning the persons reported missing during the war, as well as further collaboration in searching for them, is another area that is important for confidence-building.

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10 "On 4 April 1994, an agreement on the refugee question was signed in Moscow in the presence of Boutros Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary-General, Andrey Kozyrev, the Russian minister of foreign affairs, and various Western ambassadors. The Moscow agreement set up a quadripartite commission with representatives of Russia and the UN, as well as Georgia and Abkhazia, to supervise the return of refugees; this began work in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi at the end of April 1994..." Jonathan Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability*, RIIA, London, 1996, p. 31.

Demographic Balance

Demographic relations that may benefit one side or the other is a major concern of both parties, but especially the Abkhaz. No progress achieved on the question of political status would be of much value to the Abkhaz if the pre-war demographic balance were restored. Hence most discussions on political issues, even if they are not explicitly linked to demography, have a demographic dimension that should not be underestimated in efforts to understand the motives of both parties.

The demographic position of the Abkhaz community has been progressively weakened, since the 1860s, through an immigration flow of Georgians (mainly of the Megrelian sub-ethnos), Russians and Armenians. Abkhazians felt particularly threatened by the massive immigration of Georgians that started in the 1930s, leading the proportion of Abkhazians in the total population to decline to 17 or 18% per cent by the 1980s, when their number was about the same as that of both the Russian and Armenian communities in Abkhazia, and less than half that of the Georgians (approximately 46%).

The importance of this issue needs to be recognized in the negotiation process if real progress is to be achieved. The Abkhaz had hoped to win time after the war by slowing down the negotiations and postponing a final solution, in order to establish their position on the international scene and change the demographic balance in their favour by a massive repatriation of the diaspora Abkhaz. Their hope that these objectives would be achieved, thereby strengthening their negotiating position, has waned since then.

According to E. Wesselink, the repatriation of Abkhazians from abroad should not be expected in the near future:

> The repatriation movement never gained momentum. The number of returnees are counted in hundreds rather than in thousands. A number of delegations visited the North Caucasus around 1990 to study the prospects for repatriation programmes. The visitors were disappointed at the low standard of living in the North Caucasus. Another problem was the fact that the Abkhaz in Abkhazia appeared to be Christians and that the other North West Caucasians showed no real interest in religious teachings.[11]

Nor is there any sign of international recognition for the Abkhazian State, and even leading Chechen politicians have withdrawn their support from the Abkhazian case.[12] But even more important is the fact that the permanent threat and dire economic prospects are worsening rath-er than improving the ethno-demographic balance of the Abkhaz. They are emigrating, thereby voting with their feet against current policies. Already there seem to be more Georgians and Armenians than Abkhaz in Abkhazia, and this trend may not change if the approach based on playing for time continues.

While the importance of the ethno-demographic issue is at present an obstacle to reconciliation, it seems likely that it may eventually turn into a powerful stimulus in the search of compromise. One can imagine Georgians accepting or even encouraging the repatriation of diaspora Abkhaz

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11 Wesselink, Egbert, *The North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey*, Writenet, May 1996, [pp. 17-18]; see also Joel Boutroue and Stephen F. Jones*, Prospect for the Return of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees to Abkhazia*, UNHCR, May 1997.

12 There are also some other Caucasian leaders who have withdrawn their support from Abkhazia. Remarkably, this trend has been noticed in North Ossetia, and even more unexpectedly, in South Ossetia. "In Georgia's pre-independence and early independence period South Ossetia maintained close links with Abkhazia but these ties have gradually weakened...", Jonathan Aves, *op.cit*., p. 35.

in exchange for the gradual return of refugees, and thus a certain demographic balance could be negotiated and secured. Even if a significant repatriation process would require political stability and economic revival, the process of repatriation could start on more than a symbolic scale. But only compromises between Abkhaz and Georgians can promote such a process, and Tbilisi should be aware of this asset in the negotiations. At present, however, the Georgian political establishment is strongly opposed to the idea of Abkhazian repatriation.

The Abkhazian Language and Cultural Security

Cultural insecurity, or a national community's fear of losing its ethnic and cultural identity, is a vitally important factor in the Abkhaz attitude towards reconciliation prospects. The Abkhaz traditionally tend to lean more than the Georgians towards the Russian culture and language, and at the same time they stress their ethnic proximity to the North Caucasian groups of Adyghs and Circassians. These cultural attitudes conflict with those of the Georgians, who have a strong pro-Western bent. Such a cultural clash between the Abkhazians and Georgians was potentially exacerbated by the displacement of the strongly Russified Georgian (mostly Megrelian) population of Abkhazia to the more explicitly Georgian cultural environment.

The majority of Abkhazians, in particular the Christian population in the southern part of the region, are culturally very close to the neighbouring Megrelians, to the extent that until recently there were no clear borderlines of ethnic self-identification. Some members of a family might, for instance, consider themselves as being Georgian, while others in the same family regard themselves as Abkhaz. Pragmatic considerations play a role here. Georgians and Abkhaz share many family names. Paradoxically, some very patriotic people on both sides have the same family name. These facts generate additional mutual suspicion and lead to accusations of assimilatory policies.

Georgians, formerly the largest ethnic group in Abkhazia, generally accept the Abkhazians' right to have their language recognized as a state language. Unlike in the past (in Gamsakhurdia's time particularly, this was not always the dominant opinion), now they also acknowledge that the Abkhazians are an "autochthonous" population, a status they do not ascribe to other ethnic groups in Abkhazia, such as Russians or Armenians. At the same time, Georgians believe that they themselves have the same right to be considered an autochthonous population there, a claim that is based on various historical arguments, such as the dominance of Georgian inscriptions on Abkhazian monasteries and other historic monuments. The Abkhaz are unwilling to accept such arguments, fearing that the re-establishment of the Georgian majority and culture in Abkhazia, without strong guarantees, could endanger the very survival of their own culture and the fate of the nation itself. The Abkhaz perceive the Russian cultural milieu as less dangerous for their own cultural survival, owing to the diversity and size of the Russian cultural arena. Many joint initiatives could be taken in the cultural field shared by Georgians and Abkhaz, to begin with, for instance, the recreation of the historic Abkhaz archives burnt in Sukhumi during the war, by providing copies of relevant documents and other materials; the restoration of libraries; co-operation in the field of education, for example in preparing text-books in the Abkhazian language, etc. Great caution, however, would be needed here on the Georgian side, due to the ever-present suspicion of Georgian cultural expansionism.

Armenians in Abkhazia

The Armenian population, which already dominated some districts before the war, is at present considered by some experts to constitute the largest community in Abkhazia. They are, how-ever, strongly under-represented on government bodies. In the past, they generally expressed their solidarity with the Abkhazians in their struggle for secession. Some Armenians from Armenia and Karabakh took part in military action on the Abkhazian side, while the majority of the few Armenians fighting on the Georgian side during the war came from other regions of Georgia. While the Armenian government in Yerevan explicitly states its neutrality in the conflict, favouring the search for a peaceful solution, and declares its support for Georgia's territorial integrity, there used to be great sympathy for the Abkhaz case among the Armenian population and nationalist political circles in Armenia proper. According to Michael Ochs,[13] Levon Ter-Petrossyan was considered, after the 1995 parliamentary and 1996 presidential elections, as a democrat, a legitimate president, and more generally "a rational guy with whom you can talk and with whom you can compromise, not a nationalist". Tbilisi was unhappy about Ter-Petrossyan's weakened position, and worried about political instability in Armenia.

In June 1997, during an official visit by the Armenian president to Georgia, Ter-Petrossyan and Shevardnadze went together to Akhalkalaki, where the Armenian president declared that the last thing Armenia needed was to have problems with Georgia regarding Akhalkalaki, which has a large Armenian minority.[14] This concern is not shared by the Dashnaks (an opposition nationalist party in Armenia), who have territorial claims against Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. From the Georgian perspective, a weakening of Ter-Petrossyan's position in Armenia would reduce his leverage on the militant, nationalist Armenian groupings.

Relations with North Caucasians/Adyghes

The Abkhaz strive for closer relations with the North Caucasians, and particularly the Adyghes (including the Circassians and Kabardinians), who belong to the same linguistic group as the Abkhaz, unlike most of the other North Caucasian ethnic groups. Nevertheless, since the co-ordinated resistance to Russian conquest during the Great Caucasian War of the 19th century – in which the battle between the Russians and Abkhazians constituted the final episode – Abkhazians have developed a strong sense of a common fate and identity with the Northern Caucasus, further strengthened by their co-operative relationship with the descendants of Mo-hajirs (belonging to different North-Caucasian ethnic groups) in the Near East and Turkey, and also by their later attempts to join this fragile North Caucasian unity after the February Revolu-tion of 1917. During perestroika, there was a new attempt at such a union with the creation of the Confederation of the Mountainous Peoples of the Caucasus. This Confederation's first conference took place in August 1989 in Sukhumi, regarded as the future capital of the new union. The various nationalities represented in the Confederation have no fear of being dominated by any one group – a confidence which feels very different from what they experienced throughout their history with Russia or Georgia. This explains the attractiveness of the idea of creating a multiethnic union of Caucasians, even if such a union could be considered romantic and will certainly not be easy to achieve. The Abkhaz scholar Gueorgui Otyrba has formulated this per-ception as follows:[15]

> The history and the destiny of Abkhazia are closely connected with those of all the peoples of the North Caucasus. Today they share a common history of suffering and oppression, of depor-

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13 *The Caucasus and the Caspian: 1996 Seminar Series*, vol. II, F. Hill (ed.), Harvard University, J.F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, 1996, Presentation by Michael Ochs, p. 77.

14 *Ibid.*

> tations and cultural destruction, and of fighting powerful enemies. They also share a determination to protect themselves against a repetition of history. They have seized the opportunity created by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and by Russia's and Georgia's relative weakness, to assert their rights and bring about a situation that can provide better guarantees for their survival in the future.

The Abkhaz will therefore strive – even if this is not at the moment explicitly expressed during the negotiations – for the creation of open borders to the North Caucasus, and in particular for unhindered cultural and economic exchange with the Adyghes. For the Georgians, transparent borders are still a sensitive issue, however, as are its borders with North Ossetia, Chechnya and Daghestan. In all these cases the Georgian government has to cope with the consequences of having national minorities of the same ethnic group inhabiting both sides of a state border.

In conceiving the future of the Caucasus, Georgians stress their central – both advantageous and dangerous – position in the region and would like to secure a central role in regional politics. Georgia's relations with most of its northern neighbours have improved significantly since the end of the Chechen war, culminating in the official visit by the Chechen president, Maskhadov, to Georgia in autumn 1997. The Georgian leadership hopes that the Western Caucasian mountain peoples will follow the example of the Chechens, who have earned considerable respect in the region, and thus ensure more neutrality in the event of renewed conflict.

The Russian Presence and Russian Border

The Russians control their border with Abkhazia, its coastal zone and have military bases there. Russia is also the exclusive provider of peace-keeping forces, acting formally under the aegis of the CIS. It exercises significant control over the external and internal policies of the Sukhumi government. The economic blockade imposed by Russia under Georgian political pressure conforms to the traditional pattern of Russian politics: its aim is to weaken all the parties in conflict so that it can effectively continue to play the role of arbiter in the dispute.

Russia's policies in Abkhazia, as elsewhere in the Caucasus and in the "Near Abroad" regions, are in keeping with a "post-imperialist" value system, as described by Pavel Baev:[16]

> The most distinctive feature of Russia's policies towards the other fourteen states which emerged from the rubble of the USSR is inconsistency often bordering on incomprehensibility. (...) What makes the political complexities even more striking is the quite broad consensus among Russia's political élites on the main policy goals in the so-called "Near Abroad". This consensus had already emerged by late 1993 and survived all the turbulent election campaigns. (...) To my mind, if a definition of Russian policy is needed or indeed possible, it is rather 'post-imperialist'; this notion refers to a declining power which tries to compensate for inevitable retreats by some new engagements, feels the need to protect compatriots left "out there" but desperately lacks the resources to do so, and attempts to prevent spill-over from various violent conflicts while being itself a major source of instability.

From the Abkhazian perspective, the Russian presence, notwithstanding all its vacillations, constitutes the only guarantee against a catastrophic renewal of the military operation, and against the risk of losing the gains from their previous victory. This enables the Russians to

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15 Otyrba, Gueorgui, *War in Abkhazia: The Regional Significance of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict*, in: *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New Independent States of Eurasia*, (ed.) Roman Szporluk, Armonk, NY, Sharpe, 1994, p. 287.

16 Baev, Pavel, *Russia's Policies in the Caucasus*, RIIA, London, 1997, p. 47.

manipulate Abkhazian concerns to their own advantage, but the Abkhaz cannot fully rely on Russian support, which may be withdrawn as soon as the stakes change. The Georgians, while blaming the Russian presence for prolonging the stalemate in the conflict, nevertheless expect that the Russians will sooner or later take their side.

Economic Development

There is a low level of market economy in Abkhazia, with most food grown for domestic consumption. Many inhabitants possess some land which is enough for their subsistence. Those who are employed in the public sector and who have not been paid for months have been given plots of land instead of wages by the government. There is some small trade, for instance between Gali and Sukhumi. Due to the CIS blockade, the import of goods – some Turkish ships travel to Sukhumi – barely meets the population's needs.

Major export items are tangerines and other citrus fruit. The export of the surplus production of between 60,000 and 100,000 tons of citrus fruit to Russia is extremely difficult because of the semi-closure, by Russian officials, of the railway and road linking Abkhazia with Russia, while domestic industry lacks the capacity to process the crop into juice or concentrate. Other exports are nuts and scrap metal. The road system is very bad and there are few cars, though there is some public transport in the bigger towns. There is also some traffic between Gali and Zugdidi (on the Georgian side) – this has to be registered with the Gali authorities, where tax must be paid; there are also several unofficial (easier and cheaper) crossing points on the Georgian/Abkhaz border. Electric energy is more regular in Abkhazia than in most parts of Georgia, thanks to the power supply from the Inguri dam and from Russia. Widespread economic hardship, however, is driving more and more emigrants out of the region.

In the meantime, the Georgian economy is reviving and is even arousing increasing interest among potential investors, even though the current situation should not be seen through rosy-tinted glasses. Co-operation on the economic rehabilitation and development of Abkhazia could, in the event of a lasting consensus between the two opposing sides, succeed in attracting significant international resources, as is currently happening in Tskhinvali. This could prove to be the best means for combining the interests of both sides and fostering mutual understanding.

The areas of technical co-operation that serve the interests of both sides can easily be defined as soon as a framework for such discussion is created with the assistance of the UN and OSCE missions, and these may represent the best arena for the most important and difficult endeavour – building confidence between the former adversaries.

Physical Security of Citizens and the Possibility of a New Wave of Violence

Despite the current negotiations, the possibility of new outbursts of violence remains. The Georgian and Abkhaz governments, as well as the mediators, now have to define what their reaction would be in such a situation. Although there is much discussion of the possibility of a new war, no preventive action is being taken. It is far from clear how atrocities and violent actions against the civilian population would be prevented. A discussion needs to be started on how to design mechanisms for humanitarian intervention and on the types of intervention that would be helpful in de-escalating the conflict, in order to reduce casualties and other negative consequences for the peace process.

Prospects

The strong interdependence of the conflicts in the region is another very important factor to be taken into account when designing peace initiatives for Abkhazia. A future settlement may change the balance of forces in the Caucasus region. Hence a holistic approach to the region's problems, one which takes into account its specific cultural and political features, is critical for drafting effective regional policies.

It is interesting to notice that while the governments often refer to the Israeli-Palestinian experience, the NGO community and those involved in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue pay relatively little attention to the fruitful ideas that have been put forward in the Middle East conflict. This concerns initiatives such as the Oslo Declaration, signed initially by the Palestinian and Jewish partisans of a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which proposes certain steps for achieving this. Private initiatives may start attracting public opinion to positive ideas, for instance the collection of signatures in support of peace (with a third/Western party doing the collecting). Other lessons to be learnt include the vital importance of a proper (especially temporal) coordination of initiatives.[17]

By the second half of 1997, the Sukhumi and Tbilisi governments seemed to be more open to real compromises. The obstacles are, however, great. One of the factors is external: Moscow's unwillingness to lose this very effective lever of control over Georgian policies, and its paradoxical desire to maintain such control notwithstanding great economic losses due to the blockade of transport and communications travelling from Russia to Turkey and passing through Abkhazian territory, as well as the other benefits of having a peaceful, prosperous neighbour in the south.

Even more important is the unwillingness of the Abkhazians to risk a restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*, i.e., to return to a situation in which they would be a minority, unable to preserve the monopoly of power in a democratic scenario of development, regardless of the legal status they would acquire within the framework of Georgia. One of the scenarios being discussed at present is a territorial division of Abkhazia into a number of districts, in each of which either the Abkhazians or the Georgians would establish their political control. The Abkhazian government could not make such a decision, based on the "peace for territory" principle, without strong popular support. Detailed scenarios for such a process are lacking. The parties have defined no priorities or negotiable elements that could constitute a basis for a mutually acceptable compromise, and no creative approaches are being adopted in the search for such a compromise. This is partly due to the governments' lack of political will to achieve real results, and also partly to particular group interests linked to the suspended situation of "no war – no peace". Both governments are hostages to their own declarations and promises. Great courage and political inspiration are needed to break down stereotypes and secure popular support for innovative approaches. It is vitally necessary to develop a series of detailed scenarios that would be acceptable to each side, and then work on the gradual convergence of at least some of them – this may lead to the realization that the differences in viewpoint between the former adversaries are not as great as they previously appeared to be. The majority of these differences are, contrary to popular belief, not mutually exclusive – rather, they are symbolic or terminological in nature, and could be overcome if due effort were made.

As the two conflicting parties have different priorities – for instance concerning their legal status or the return of refugees – it is quite difficult to solve individual problems when they are

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[17] I thank Edie Kaufmann of the University of Jerusalem for these suggestions.

negotiated as part of a whole package. Hence, one of the ways of proceeding with resolving the conflict is to try to narrow the focus temporarily, breaking down the problem into a list of individual issues which are closely linked to one another, certainly, but which may nevertheless be handled and discussed separately. Only after considering these issues and coming to some agreements, or at least reaching an understanding of one another's viewpoints, will it be possible to discuss the whole package again, in an integrated form.

Time is working against the interests of the Abkhazians, but this does not mean that either the Georgians or Russians would benefit from a further postponement of a peace settlement. Russia has actually lost – and is continuing to lose – a great deal, having been cut off from her southern transportation routes, alienated Georgia and forfeited important levers of influence in the region. But Georgia too is a loser in this zero-sum game. Apart from the human suffering caused by a prolonged conflict, fewer and fewer Georgians may be inclined to return to Abkhazia, while the uncertain future of the IDPs is posing enormous problems for the weak Georgian State. At the same time, Georgia is losing the considerable economic benefits it would enjoy with an integrated economy and a north-south transportation route.

One potential area for economic co-operation may be the prospect of transforming the Gali district into a free economic zone which would be put provisionally under an international security regime. This would create a safe buffer area, preventing open military action, but it could also serve as a pilot initiative for further balanced economic co-operation. Gali is important in this respect not only because of its border location or because of its Georgian population, but also thanks to its high economic – particularly agricultural – potential. It is worth noting that, even in the current strained situation, Gali is to a certain extent already performing the role of a clearing-house and exchange market for the two sides.

I am, of course, fully aware that no concrete settlement can be reached by individuals from the two communities that are not representing their respective governments, but their proposals can contribute to a spirit of compromise, which is essential to the negotiation process. If we are able to find common ground in at least some areas, this could serve as a starting point for broader discussions. I am quite sure that almost all of the contradictions discussed are resolvable, if innovative thinking is applied, and if we try to look at the problems through the eyes of other side as well. The existing problems have to be correlated to the real, basic needs and interests of both peoples, as distinct from populist slogans and wrongly perceived interests that only lead to further confrontation. It does seem that if the intellectuals of both sides, supported by international experts and mediators, were able to formulate at least a few concrete ideas in the form of a set of declarations, this could be instrumental in establishing a co-operative approach to conflict resolution, and would help all the sides involved to see the conflict and its consequences through other eyes, instead of just their own.

A helpful instrument in proceeding further with the peace and negotiation processes could be the creation of a mixed discussion forum constituted by respected individuals from both sides. These would receive a mandate from their respective leaderships to discuss the possible terms of the conflict settlement, and would regularly inform their leaderships about progress, but would not have the authority to sign any documents or make decisions. Such a forum, moderated by international experts and assisted by the authority of organizations such as the UN or OSCE, could perform several important functions: generating and testing new ideas in a non-restrictive environment; maintaining a two-way exchange of information between the governments; working as an informal negotiating body, and as a public advocate of a peaceful solution.

Conclusions

While it is important to speculate about how and when the solution to the Abkhazian conflict will be found, it may be of more immediate value to pose the question of where alternative ideas and influences that could shape the future solution will come from. In broad terms, one can identify three such sources: first, political and social currents within Abkhazia/Georgia, second, Russia, including the peoples of the Northern Caucasus, and third, international institutions.

Both sides have been labouring under the illusion that time is on their side. Both are now losing, however, as a result of the deadlock in the conflict, and experiencing major economic, demographic and political losses. There can be no winners in the game they are currently playing. In the first few years after the war, the Abkhaz could hope that time would bring international recognition and the repatriation of the Abkhaz from the diaspora, but this seems less probable now. Even the support of the North Caucasians, which played an important role during the war, is not assured at present, especially that of the Vainakh peoples. In its turn, if the Georgian government too hoped to use time to strengthen its military forces decisively, secure Russian support for its case and see the impoverishment and weakening of the Sukhumi government, they must be disappointed, as there are no signs of such trends. Indeed, in the immediate post-war period the conflict helped Georgia to distance itself from Russian dominance, and develop an independent approach in its state-building. Today, when Russian strength is waning, and the Georgian State has already begun to overcome most of the difficulties besetting it at the start of independence, priorities need to be changed.

The present situation cannot continue indefinitely. Pressures on the conflicting parties, both from without and from within, are mounting, while the leaderships (who until recently demonstrated a manifest lack of will to resolve the conflict) now seem to be becoming more flexible and open to compromise. There are several possible alternative solutions – the people of Abkhazia and Georgia will decide which of them shall prevail.

Stanislav Lakoba

Abkhazia, Georgia and the Caucasus Confederation

The post-Soviet period, reminiscent of and in many cases seeming to repeat, the events of 1917-1921 after the break-up of the Russian Empire, has demonstrated quite clearly that the difficulties in Abkhazian-Georgian relations cannot be resolved by those two countries alone, without involving the Caucasus as a whole in this issue.

At the same time it is obvious today that the entire Caucasus has become the arena for a struggle for energy resources and fierce clashes between the geopolitical and strategic interests of Turkey and Russia, Iran and the West. The marked weakening of Russia's position in this key region was a result of the war in Chechnya and of the continuing complete blockade of Abkhazia. The battle for the pipeline, or rather for the route for transporting Caspian oil, cannot fail to influence political developments and automatically puts the people of the Caucasus on the knife edge between war and peace.

In this state of imbalance, neighbouring countries and powers are trying to create their own areas of responsibility, new alliances and regional as well as international associations under the aegis of the United Nations, the OSCE and NATO. Over the centuries the entire Caucasus, or portions of it, has been alternately or simultaneously part of Iran, Turkey or Russia, which still regard these territories as traditionally theirs. Thus Turkey sees a substantial part of the Caucasus as part of an extensive Turkic state, Turan. Iran in turn sees the future of some Caucasian countries in an alliance including Iran itself and certain Central Asian republics. Russia, though still laying claim to Transcaucasia ("Transcaucasia" is a peculiarly Russian term, resulting from its wars with Iran and Turkey), mostly because of oil, is now forced to keep an eye on the North Caucasus, realising late in the day what is happening on its southern flank.

Early pacification of the explosive Caucasus region is most unlikely, given this distribution of forces in obvious conflict. As regards the prospect of future state and legal relations between Abkhazia and Georgia, the way forward seems to be within the framework of a Caucasus Confederation.

Not long before the break-up of the USSR the eminent Sovietologist A. Avtorkhanov gave the following warning and advice:

> Caucasians must understand that if they fight among themselves they will never be either free or independent. In the eyes of the outside world such a region does not deserve freedom, but should be permanently occupied by a strong state and its armed forces... I would recommend all autonomous regions in the Caucasus to combine in one republic, which already existed under the name of "Gorskaya Respublika" (Mountain Peoples' Republic). In spite of our multilingual nature, but in view of our common historical, social, cultural and geopolitical heritage, the outside world gave us one general national name – the Russians called us the "Caucasus gortsy" (mountain people)" and in the West we were known as "Circassians". We have never known racial discrimination or religious friction.[1]

The idea of a Caucasus Confederation had its origins in the spring of 1917 and was developed further in 1918. Caucasian unity was proclaimed at the first Mountain People's Congress on 1 May 1917 in Vladikavkaz. At the Congress the "Alliance of United Mountain People of the

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1 Gazeta: *Kavkaz* (Sukhum), 1990, no. 1.

North Caucasus and Dagestan", headed by T. Chermoev, a Chechen, R. Kaplanov, a Kumyk, P. Kotsev, a Kabardian, V. Dzhabagiev, an Ingush, and others, was officially established. The Abkhazian people also became full members of this alliance. A Mountain Peoples' Government was formed in November 1917. S. Ashkhatsava represented Abkhazia in it.[2]

On the eve of this important event, on 8 November 1917, the Abkhazian People's Congress in Sukhum elected the first parliament, the "Abkhazian People's Council" (ANS) and the following vital documents were approved: "Declaration by the Abkhazian People's Congress" and the "Constitution of the Abkhazian People's Council". It is interesting to note that the representative of the Abkhazian Parliament gave the following address on 19 November 1917 in Tiflis at the opening of the first Georgian parliament (the Georgian National Council): "I am happy that the high honour of conveying warm greetings to you on behalf of the Abkhazian People's Council has fallen to my lot. The Abkhazian people, as part of the Alliance of united mountain peoples, congratulate fair Georgia on its first steps on the way to national self-determination... The Abkhazians, having formed an alliance with their northern brethren are therefore convinced that in the near future they will join the noble Georgian people in a common alliance of all the peoples of the Caucasus. In this future alliance the Abkhazian people see themselves as full members of the United Mountain Peoples' Alliance".[3]

However, according to Emir-Khassan, a prominent figure in North Caucasus emigration, this was the period when a number of mistakes were made, which led to the isolation of the South Caucasus from the North Caucasus and the creation of the "so-called Transcaucasian Federation". Emir-Khassan observed:

> The differences that began to appear even during the first revolutionary period became even more pronounced. A narrow national egoism flourished. The minds of Caucasian statesmen were entirely directed to organising separate nations; each one was protecting and establishing only his own frontiers, without regard to what neighbouring peoples were doing.[4]

The situation in the North Caucasus very quickly worsened, with the increasing savagery of the civil war and the formation in March 1918 of the Terek Soviet Republic. However, the previous 1st Mountain People's Congress still traced "the outlines of national ideology", which led the North Caucasus to proclaim its independence within a year. It is clear from the minutes of the first meeting of the Batumi peace conference dated 11 May 1918 that it was attended by delegations from Germany, Turkey, the Transcaucasian Republic and the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus and Dagestan.[5] On the same day the independence of the Caucasus Mountain Peoples' Republic and its separation from Russia were announced. The Republic included Dagestan, Chechen-Ingushetia, Ossetia, Kabarda, Karachai-Balkaria, Abkhazia and Adygeya. Its territory extended from the Black Sea to the Caspian and amounted to 260,000 square kilometres, with a population of almost 6.5 million.[6]

The deputies from the Abkhazian People's Council, A. Shervashidze (Chachba), T. Marshaniya, S. Basariya and others then appealed to the Turkish government and declared at the Batumi Conference that "Abkhazia does not wish to be included in the group of Transcaucasian peoples, but aligns itself with the North Caucasus union of mountain peoples, which should build a

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2 Soyuz obedinennykh gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana (1917-1918), *Gorskaya respublika (1918-1920). Dokumenty i materialy*, Makhachkala, 1994, p. 4-5, 134.

3 TsGVIA RF, f. 1300, op. 1, d. 130, l. 135 ob.

4 *Severnyi Kavkaz* (Warsaw), 1934, no. 2, p. 11.

5 *Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnei politike Zakavkaz'ya i Gruzii*, Tiflis, 1919, p. 312-313.

6 Ahmet Hazir Hizal, – Kuzey Kafkaz, Ankara, 1961, p. 143 (in Turkish).

separate state under the protection of Turkey".[7] Later, during the years of Stalinist repression, particularly in 1937-1941, this was the pretext for eliminating practically all the Abkhazian intelligentsia,[8] who were in sympathy with the idea of a Caucasus Confederation.

The territory of the independent Mountain Peoples' Republic of 1918, which was recognised internationally, coincided precisely with that pan-Caucasian area that had been involved in the mountain peoples' national liberation campaign in the nineteenth century and developed under the banner of Shamil. After Shamil had been forced to lay down his arms in 1859, the Ubykh, Adygeyans and Abkhazians continued their unequal struggle with tsarism for a further five years. This ended on 21 May 1864 with a parade of Russian and Georgian forces on the Krasnaya Polyana, in historic Abkhazia. This marked the end of the Caucasian war (1817-1864). The historian Ali Sultan made the following comment with regard to the tragic events of those years:

> In none of the conquered regions did Russian imperialism produce such devastation as it did in the North Caucasus. Here, as a result of many years of aggressive war, many localities settled since ancient times disappeared from the face of the earth, the boundaries of areas settled by individual autochthonous tribes were altered and the cultural monuments of the past and an ancient civilisation were destroyed. In many cases entire ethnic units were uprooted and sent into the unknown... The western provinces of the Caucasus, Western Adygeya and Abkhazia were particularly hard hit: their populations were forced into large-scale emigration in the second half of the nineteenth century and found refuge in what was then the Ottoman Empire.[9]

This is a suitable place to note that on 9 May 1984 the US Congress approved an address of welcome to the peoples of the North Caucasus to mark the 66th anniversary of their declaration of independence. On that portentous day Congressman Robert Roy addressed the House of Representatives on the anniversary of the proclamation on 11 May 1918 of the Caucasian Mountain Peoples' Republic. The Congress documents also included a "Brief historical note on the struggle by the oppressed peoples of the Northern Caucasus for independence..."[10]

The Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic (ZDFR) broke up after the formation of the Mountain Peoples' Republic and on the same day, 26 May 1918, following an ultimatum by Turkey, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was proclaimed (the Azerbaijan Republic was proclaimed on 27 May and the Armenian Republic on 28 May). This period in the history of the Caucasus has been called the "Caucasian May", and it was said in this connection in one of the proclamations: "When the anti-nationalist storm of bolshevism was raging in Russia, the idea of healthy national statehood was triumphant in the Caucasus".[11]

The instrument of Georgian independence was adopted on the day on which the republic was formed (26 May 1918); however, this did not define the frontiers of Georgia. Preliminary outlines of the frontier were drawn for the first time by someone with a very keen interest in the matter, in a secret letter to Tiflis dated 28 May 1918, by the German general von Lossow, who undertook to make every effort to ensure that "Germany would assist Georgia in securing its frontiers".[12]

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7 *Istoriya Abkhazii*, Sukhum, 1991, p. 291.

8 R. Clogg, "Documents from the KGB archive in Sukhum, Abkhazia in the Stalin years", *Central Asian Survey*, 1995, 14(1), pp. 181-188.

9 *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 1935, no. 9, p. 16.

10 *US Congress Bulletin*, 9 May 1984, 2nd Session, sitting 98, vol. 130, no. 59 (in English).

11 *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 1937, no. 37, p. 13.

12 Z. Avalov, *Nezavisimost' Gruzii v mezhdunarodnoi politike 1918-1921*, Paris, 1924; New York, 1982, p. 68.

However, even von Lossow, an ally of the Georgian government and at the same time a supporter of the Caucasian Confederation, proposed the temporary inclusion of the Sukhum district – Abkhazia – within Georgia (i.e. within Germany's area of influence) with a reservation to prevent interference by his ally (Turkey). In commenting on this letter the international lawyer Z. Avalov (Avalishvili), a distinguished figure in the Georgian republic, wrote:

> The reservation in the letter is curious: the Sukhum district (including Gagry) shall be part of Georgia until Georgia forms a separate state within the Caucasus. However, should *a confederation of Caucasian peoples* (italics mine – S.L.) be formed involving Georgia the population of the Sukhum district should be allowed to determine its position among the Caucasian countries. In other words, in this case the population of Abkhazia would have the choice of union with Georgia, entering the Union of Mountain Peoples *or being part of the Caucasus Confederation as a separate state-canton* (italics mine – S.L.). It is apparent from this what importance was attached to the plan for political union of the Caucasian peoples at the precise time when circumstances made dissolution of the Transcaucasian Union essential.[13]

Thus Abkhazia was outside Georgian territory when Georgian independence was proclaimed on 26 May, because since 11 May 1918 it had been part of the Caucasus Mountain Peoples' Peoples' Republic, which unfortunately lasted for only a year.

In breach of the arrangements with Abkhazia, as early as 17-19 June 1918, troops from the Georgian republic supported by the military might of Germany landed in Sukhum and virtually occupied the country. General A.S. Lukomskii, Denikin's comrade-in-arms, wrote in this connection: "Taking advantage of German support, Georgia occupied Abkhazia and the Sochi district against the wishes of the population ..."[14] By this time Abkhazia was in an extremely difficult position, because it was virtually deprived of real support from the "Mountain Peoples' government" due to the increasingly brutal civil war in the North Caucasus. However, the Mountain Peoples' Republic government condemned the Georgian invasion of Abkhazia. Thus in June 1918 the Foreign Minister of the Caucasus Mountain Peoples' Republic (Gaidar Bammat) lodged a protest with the government of Georgia and with Schulenburg, the head of the German government diplomatic mission in the Caucasus about the incursion by German troops into Sukhum and "the presence of Georgian bands in Abkhazia".[15]

Several months later, in August 1918, T. Chermoev, the president of the Mountain Peoples' government, again protested to the German government about the occupation of Abkhazian territory by Georgian troops supported by regular German army units. At the same time he gave a warning that the peoples of the North Caucasus, linked to Georgia by "race and a long-standing community of interests" must not allow any political complications to interfere with their drive for "the closest possible ties, up to and including *confederation*" (italics mine – S.L.), and subsequently

> On behalf of my Government I protest in the strongest terms against Georgian policy in *Abkhazia, a constituent part of the Federal Republic of the Union of Caucasus Mountain Peoples* (italics mine – S.L.) and my Government considers it essential for Georgian troops, civil servants and emissaries to be withdrawn from Abkhazia immediately, in order to avoid the serious complications that may result from this Georgian Government policy.[16]

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13 Ibid., p. 68-69.

14 Arkhiv russkoi revolyutsii, Berlin, 1922, vol. 3(5-6), p. 114.

15 Soyuz ob'edinennykh gortsev, op.cit., p. 132.

16 Ibid., p. 133-135.

It was during this period, in June-August 1918, that Aleksandr Shervashidze, Tatash Marshaniya, Simon Basariya and other influential Abkhazians appealed for aid to Abkhazian makhadzhirs living in Turkey whose forefathers had been compelled to leave their motherland in the nineteenth century as a result of the Russo-Caucasian war. The people and parliamentary deputies of Abkhazia regarded the forcible action by Georgia as armed intervention in the Mountain Peoples' State. Noi Zhordania, the president of the Georgian Republic government, recalled that at that time the representatives of the North Caucasus gave Georgia an ultimatum: "Abkhazia is ours, get out!"[17] The Turks in their turn were dreaming of Sukhum and planning to "protect Abkhazia from the Georgians" with the help of the Chechens.[18]

On the night of 27 June 1918 an Abkhazian armed force from Turkey landed near the River Kodori. Turkey was not involved in this conflict at the official level; the landing party was essentially an armed force of the Mountain Peoples' Republic. In addition, German sources make clear that in June-August 1918 the "Mountain Peoples' government" was still laying claim to Abkhazia and the port of Sukhum. It is not surprising, therefore, that there were repeated seaborne landings by Abkhazian makhadzhirs in Abkhazia during the same few months. These aspirations were fundamentally at variance with German policy interests in this region.

The Mountain Peoples' Republic government continued to regard Abkhazia as part of its state, in spite of the fact that it was occupied by Georgia. Thus a coloured ethnographic and political map of the Caucasus Mountain Peoples' Republic intended for the Paris Peace Conference was printed in French on the orders of the Mountain Peoples' Delegation in 1919 in Lausanne (a representative of Abkhazia also travelled to the conference as part of the Mountain Peoples' delegation[19]). On this map both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were shown as within the Mountain Peoples' State,[20] not in Georgia.

Carl Erich Bechhofer, who was in the Caucasus at the time, described Georgian government policy as follows:

> The "Free and Independent Social-Democratic State of Georgia" will remain in my memory forever as a classic example of an imperialistic "small nation", both in the matter of external territorial seizure and in bureaucratic tyranny within the country. Its chauvinism passes all bounds.[21]

The Georgian politician Z. Avalov also described the situation at the time very accurately:

> At the beginning of 1921 Georgia had a simple party organisation in its government and in the form of the Constituent Assembly...Georgian democracy in 1918-1921, which was a form of social-democratic dictatorship, i.e. right-wing Marxism, was the preparation for the triumph of Soviet dictatorship in Georgia.[22]

The "Mountain Peoples' Government" was forced to emigrate in 1921 as Soviet power became established in the Caucasus. In the 1920s and 30s representatives of the Caucasus Mountain Peoples' Republic in Prague, Paris and Warsaw published the journals "Vol'nye gortsy", "Gortsy

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17 N. Zhordania, *My Life*, Stanford, 1968, p. 98.

18 G. Avetisyan, 'K voprosu o "Kavkazskom dome" i pantyurkistskikh ustremleniyakh', in: Alexei Malashenko, Bruno Coppieters, Dmitri Trenin (eds.), *Etnicheskie i regional'nye konflikty v Evrazii*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1997, p. 140.

19 Soyuz obedinennykh gortsev', op.cit., p. 197.

20 S. Kiladze, 'Edinstvo Kavkaza: popytka vykhoda iz krizisa', *Tbilisskii meridian*, 1997, no. 1, 20-22.

21 C.E. Bechhofer, *In Denikin's Russia and the Caucasus. 1919-1920*, London, 1921, p. 14.

22 Avalov Z. Nezavisimost' Gruzii v mezhdunarodnoi politike 1918-1921, Paris, 1924, p. XI-XIV.

Kavkaza", "Severnyi Kavkaz", etc. During this period the political exiles carried out an enormous amount of research on the future national state structure of the Caucasus. They published a large number of articles, recommendations and books on this pressing problem, and on 14 July 1934 in Brussels representatives of the national centres of North Caucasus, Georgia and Azerbaijan signed an international treaty of great political importance – the Caucasus Confederation Pact – with a place kept in the pact for Armenia.[23]

The Caucasus Independence Committee and the Caucasus Confederation Council, the governing body in all diplomatic activity, were set up at the same time. The Caucasus Confederation was to have been an alliance of states retaining a sovereign existence but bound together by several common ties: common customs frontiers, defence and foreign policy. The Caucasus Confederation Pact has been called a "tactical-strategic document".[24] The Polish journal "Vostok" made this comment in 1934: "An independent and united Caucasus will cease to be a source of military conflict and will become a vital element in maintaining the overall balance".

Eminent political figures spoke in defence of the Caucasus Confederation, but were against a "Caucasus community" on a federal basis, rightly regarding it as an imperfect model. Thus B. Bilatti wrote:

> A federation cannot stand compulsion... A federal link can be forged only between materially and spiritually equal values; otherwise it is likely to turn into a screen, under cover of which the strong will strive to absorb the weak. The great-power aspirations of large nations are organic phenomena derived from the very nature of mankind, and for that reason the cohabita-tion of large and small nations, even where such cohabitation is initially absolutely voluntary, is likely to end in conflict. This has been the fate of all states in which small nations have united round large nations. The former were either absorbed by the latter or finally joined forces to bring down the state and free themselves from the tie...[25]

The issue of Caucasian unity was raised several times, but came into the open again on the eve of the break-up of the USSR, when Georgian-Abkhazian differences reached their high point and developed into conflict on 15-16 July 1989. This was the negative background against which a hasty consolidation of the North Caucasus nations and Abkhazia took place. The foundations of this movement were laid in Sukhum, the capital of Abkhazia, on 25 August 1989 at the first congress of Caucasus mountain peoples, which formed the Assembly of Caucasus Mountain Peoples (AGNK), by analogy with the 1917 United Mountain Peoples' Alliance.

The second AGNK congress on 13-14 October 1990 in Nal'chik (Kabardino-Balkaria) was a vital stage. It was announced then that a period of practical work to implement a programme for a new state structure for the North Caucasus and Abkhazia was on the way. Special attention was given to the unity of the Caucasus nations, put into effect on 11 May 1918 by the proclamation of an independent state – the North Caucasus Republic.[26]

Great events followed this congress. The Russian Federation showed signs of breaking up after the collapse of the USSR, and the existence of former "union-republic" small empires was called into question. The resolve of the Chechen nation, the proclamation of an independent Chechen Republic and the election of a president in October 1991 raised the Caucasus mountain peoples' movement to a new level. The third AGNK congress was held in Sukhum in the context of the

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23 *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 1935, no. 9, p. 11.

24 *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 1934, no. 8, p. 26.

25 *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 1934, no. 8, p. 13-14.

26 *Edinenie* (Sukhum) 1991, no. 1; *Kavkaz*, 1990, no. 1.

political turbulence in Chechnya (on 1-2 November 1991). It was attended by plenipotentiary representatives of the Abaza, Abkhazian, Avar, Adygeyan, Aukhov-Chechen, Darghin, Kabarda, Lak, Ossetian (North and South Ossetia), Circassian, Chechen and Shapsug nations. Representatives of social and political movements in Georgia were also present. In his speech a Georgian parliamentary deputy also called for the entire Caucasus to merge to form a "single fist".[27]

Following a proposal by the deputies the AGNK was changed to the Confederation of Caucasus Mountain Peoples (KGNK) and a little later, in Groznyi in 1992, was renamed the Confederation of Caucasus Nations (KNK). The following declaration in particular had been made at the third KGNK congress:

> It is quite probable that, in the first stage at all levels, the Caucasian autonomous republics and oblasts will declare themselves sovereign states, and after this act of national self-assertion will in all probability begin to unite to form a new alliance – a Caucasus Confederation, which Chechnya, Dagestan, Georgia, Ingushetia, Ossetia, Kabarda, Karachai-Balkaria, Abkhazia, Adygeya, etc. may join as equal members.[28]

A Treaty was signed at the third congress and a "Declaration on a Confederated Alliance of Caucasus Mountain Peoples" was adopted. Decisions were taken to form a Caucasian Parliament, an Arbitration Tribunal, a Defence Committee, a Caucasus Communities Committee and other structures for confederation, the headquarters of which would be in Sukhum.

Even during the Georgian-Abkhazian war, in April 1993 at the London conference on the problems of the North Caucasus, representatives of Abkhazia also put forward a plan for the Caucasus Confederation.[29]

Under present conditions, such an alliance of sovereign Caucasus states in the form of a con-federation is becoming a matter of particular urgency. Even in 1934 Emir Khassan was stressing in his paper "A Caucasus Confederation" that "the Caucasus can be liberated and can retain its freedom only provided that all the Caucasus nations unite fully".[30]

Today it is quite obvious that only the Caucasians themselves, within their own union and with the support of the international community, are capable of settling vexed questions and resolving conflicts in the North and South Caucasus. Inter-Caucasian peacekeeping forces will also be needed to implement such a programme. At the present stage this seems to be essential in building a "Caucasian home" and, as the Azeri academic R. Aliev rightly observed, the "concept of inter-nation reconciliation"[31] must prevail in this process.

Of course, today it would be Utopian to raise the matter of immediate union of all states and nations in the Caucasus to form a confederation, in view of the political, territorial and religious differences between them and the lack of any single unifying ideology.[32] However, it seems quite possible at this stage to create the nucleus of such a confederation, which could consist of, for example, three countries: Abkhazia – Georgia – Chechnya. Unfortunately some Georgian academics have seen the threat of "Georgian centrism" in this model; the problems inherent in

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27 *Abkhazia*, 1991, no. 51, 1st issue, December.

28 *Abkhazia*, 1991, no. 51, 2nd issue, December.

29 See *Central Asian Survey* (1995), 14(1), p. 103.

30 *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 1934, no. 2, p. 12.

31 R. Aliev, '"Kavkazskii dom": vzglyad iz Azerbaidzhana', in: Alexei Malashenko, Bruno Coppieters, Dmitri Trenin (eds.), *Etnicheskie i regional'nye konflikty v Evrazii, vol. 1*, op.cit., p. 162.

32 Ibid., p. 168.

this will recede into the background, while the importance of the Caucasus Confederation to the world community may become of paramount importance.

Later Ingushetia, Dagestan, Ossetia (North and South), Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, Adzharia, Kabarda, Karachai-Balkaria, Circassia, Adygeya, etc. may join the A-G-C triangle, given the enormous popularity of the idea of a confederation among the Caucasian nations. A horizontal, not a vertical, structure for state legal relations among the Caucasian countries in a confederative alliance can solve the basic problem: together or apart? It appears that in such a confederation not only Georgia and Abkhazia but other Caucasian states will be both together and apart at the same time in their mutual relations. This is undoubtedly necessary at the present stage in order to overcome the existing mistrust and to build relations among the nations of the Caucasus based on equality and trust. It is quite probable that in the historical long term the Caucasus Confederation will transform itself into a federation, but this will occur peacefully and painlessly. However, to propose federal relations in the Caucasus today means complicating the situation and resorting to force and compulsion, which will never lead to pacification and stabilisation throughout the Caucasus. There cannot be partial freedom: only the Caucasus as a whole can be free.

Maarten Theo Jans

Theory and Experiences of Ethnonational Conflict Regulation: Their Relevance to the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict

Internal, Ethnonational Conflicts: Dynamics and Difficulties

At the end of the 1980s, the gradual weakening of the communist dispensation in the Soviet Union occasioned a reorganization of inter-group relations, often to the detriment of peaceful coexistence and moderation.Titular nations of Union republics and Autonomous republics found themselves locked into a process of self-definition and a quest for national and international legitimacy. The consolidation of the new states in terms of borders, population and political power brought about a nationalizing tendency which, despite existing ethnic heterogeneity, sought a close fit between the nation and the state, thereby alienating the minorities in the new states.[1] Nationalist policies and rhetoric speedily filled up the ideological space vacated by the exit of communism. Ghia Nodia correctly points out that not only was the rise of primordial nationalist feelings spurred on by the end of communist encapsulation, but these feelings were effectively stimulated through the introduction of democratic principles.

Democratic politics require the definition of the demos. Democracy, understood as the rule of the people by the people, begs the question of what is to be understood as "We, the people".[2] Group definitions inherent in nationalism proved to offer the most powerful instrument for identifying the players in the new democratic game. Insider/outsider stigmatization occurred during the definition of the demos along nationalist lines, and this gave rise to violent ethnonational tensions. The problematic necessity of defining the demos in new democratic states, as argued by Nodia, is, however, only one of the conflict-prone features of democracy. Democratic institutions also firmly install the elements of competition and group support in society. Access to political power in democracies depends on the degree of group support one manages to gain in an electoral competition. Elections are little more than a struggle for support, a competition between groups. Ethnonational definitions provide an easy and obvious basis for securing group support, support which is indispensable in the competition for power. Politicians will therefore find it tempting to use ready-made ethnic definitions for rallying popular support.

States with century-long traditions of dealing with ethnonational diversity in a democratic context (such as Belgium, Canada, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) have never ceased to be troubled by ethnonationalist mobilization. Even the textbook example of ethnonational peace and calm – Switzerland – is increasingly confronted by inter-group friction. It should hardly be surprising, therefore, that the end of communism and the subsequent introduction of democracy has given rise to a large number of internal, ethnonational conflicts. Many former Soviet states are currently struggling to come to grips with the problems of (ethnonational) diversity under the new post-communist, democratic dispensation. The nature and complexity of internal conflicts based on ethnonational division renders regulation and accommodation particularly difficult. In general, the marrying of diverging interests requires a concerted effort,

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1 R. Brubaker *Nationalism reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

2 G. Nodia, "Nationalism and democracy", in: L. Diamond, M.F. Plattner (eds.), *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Democracy*, Baltimore & London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, pp. 3-22.

and the addition of an ethnonational dimension increases even further the difficulties inherent in regulating a conflict.

Ethnonational identities base their credibility and legitimacy on an interpretation of the historical past. The reference to mythical forefathers, battles, homelands, etc., entrenches the national self-perception in history. By bringing history back into the picture, ethnonationalism also brings historical wrongs and traumas back to centre-stage in politics and conflict. But historical traumas cannot be relived in a more satisfactory way. Historical legacies are the structural foundations of a conflict situation, and it is not possible to erase them. Conflicting players seeking settlement thus have no alternative but to accept the remnants of frustration which history has left them. The past cannot be regulated. This means that historical traumas are difficult to address in concrete bargaining terms.

As Donald Horowitz points out, ethnonational affiliations tend to permeate all features of social life, especially when ethnic tensions emerge. In a conflict, an ethnonationally divided society no longer consists of workers and employers, buyers and sellers, conservatives and liberals, but essentially of members of different ethnonational groups, as the ethnonational dimension supersedes all other forms of social segmentation.[3] By homogenizing the members of an ethnonational group, ethnonationalism also becomes intimately linked with other forms of social affiliation.

Besides the purely ethnic dimension, ethnonational conflicts involve religion, ideology, economic interests, partisan politics, etc. These bundles of intertwined interests and demands are hard both to disentangle and to satisfy. The regulation of ethnonational conflicts presents the difficult task of reducing complex and intertwined demands into disentangled, workable packages of issues to be addressed. Moreover, national identities and the emotions they awaken correspond to the basic human need for self-definition in a changing and puzzling environment. Ethnonational identities infuse emotions and psychological needs into conflicts. Disputes tend to revolve around issues related to a sense of belonging, security and national pride – all of which are highly emotional and non-negotiable matters.

Zartman singles out another typical and problematic characteristic, namely, the asymmetric nature of many internal ethnonational conflicts. Tensions between insurgents and incumbents are often characterized by an asymmetry in coercive capacity, legal position, international support, numbers and administrative or bureaucratic capacity. Such asymmetric relations are less amenable to regulation because the stronger party has little incentive to deal with the weaker side on an equal footing, while the weaker side will invest more in attempts to change the disadvantageous balance of power than in attempts to settle the conflict.[4]

Internal conflicts display a recurrent pattern, in which one side tries to maintain the asymmetry which the other side is seeking to redress. Asymmetric internal conflicts are likely to remain in a state of constant flux until some level of symmetry is reached or until the existing asymmetry is no longer perceived by either side as sufficient reason not to seek a joint settlement. Needless to say, such realizations may only emerge when both sides have exhausted one another in conflict, at the expense of a great deal of time, energy and bloodshed.

Once violent acts have been perpetrated, internal conflicts often enter a spiral of violence. Repetitive cycles of violence can be arrested, but they do jeopardize the chances of a future set-

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3 D.L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985.

4 I.W. Zartman, *Elusive Peace. Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, Washington D.C., The Brookings Institution 1995.

tlement, not least because the harm inflicted raises the level of frustration which will need to be addressed in a settlement. Violence also decreases the possibility that the warring partners will perceive each other as credible and acceptable partners in dialogue.

Conflicting parties often find the thought of being on speaking terms with those who have allegedly committed atrocities against them to be unacceptable. Inter-group violence involves regular armed forces, but it also attracts uncontrolled, disparate armed groups lead by warlords or common criminals. These irregular forces gain prominence during the conflict, a prominence they are likely to lose once the peace process is on track. Though they have no vested interest in the specifics of a settlement, their lack of hierarchic control puts them in a position to derail the settlement process by not complying with agreements or by breaking fragile cease-fires.

As noted earlier, ethnonationalism touches upon many aspects of social life. Territorial, linguistic and socio-economic delimitations are part of how ethnonational groups define themselves. The overwhelming variety of ethnonational identities is made up of different mixtures of similar constituent elements. The apparent diversity of ethnonational symptoms should not distract us from identifying the similarity of underlying causes that can be found in cases of ethnonational hostility. When the specific features of each single conflict are temporarily put aside for the sake of generalization, we find that a common thread running through many ethnonational conflicts is a basic fear of extinction. Insurgent ethnonational groups in Canada, Belgium, the Basque country, Northern Ireland and South Africa, to name but a few, have all been driven by a primordial fear of being overwhelmed or, as Horowitz puts it, of being swamped by ethnonational outsiders. This anxiety often reflects the numerical inferiority of the ethnonational group or a downward demographic trend. Even where demography does not lend legitimacy to fears of extinction, the perceived disappearance of important ethnonational markers (language, customs, culture) will. Flemings were always the largest group in the Belgian population. Despite Flemish numerical preponderance, the higher social status associated with French language use stimulated an increased "frenchification" of the Flemish population. The gradual retreat of the Flemish language in favour of French led to the perception that a crucial defining characteristic of "Flemishness" was under attack. Flemings felt engulfed by the French language, and the nationalist movement capitalized on the fear of extinction of "Flemishness" in Flanders. Generally, fears of extinction – which are present in many if not all ethnonational conflicts – will need to be reduced or proved unwarranted if regulation is to be successful. In practice, this anxiety will only be allayed once institutions have been established that guarantee the continued survival of the ethnonational group. The ongoing tensions between Quebec and anglophone Canada are evidence that even the most (socio-economic) successful states remain ineffective as long as they fail to provide sufficient guarantees of ethnonational survival.

The Regulation of Internal Conflicts: What Are We Aiming at?

Pointing out the complexity of ethnonational conflict is one thing, suggesting how conflicts can be reduced and satisfactorily managed is another, even more demanding exercise. There are no uniform, straightforward answers to the question of how to reduce ethnonational conflicts. Each conflict is different – for example in time, space, parties involved, intensity, issues, etc. – and it is likely that different conflicts will require different approaches. A technique which was successful in conflict A may prove to be irrelevant – or worse still, detrimental – in conflict B. It therefore makes little sense merely to copy successful structures from one country to another in the hope of producing results which will reduce the conflict. Different diseases require different treatments.

Even if we are aware of the need for context-specific regulations, the path to be pursued needs to be specified. What precisely is meant by conflict regulation or conflict reduction? Should the intended regulation merely focus on the cessation of violent interactions, or should it do away with all sources of friction between groups in order to be deemed successful? Clearly, the first stumbling-block in dealing with internal, ethnonational conflicts is the difficulty of defining conflict regulation itself.

One could uphold an intuitive notion of peaceful coexistence devoid of conflict, but hardly any ethnonationally divided country (except perhaps Switzerland) would fit in with this intuitive notion of conflict regulation. All states characterized by ethnonational segmentation have experienced some degree of inter-group friction and conflict. If we were to accept the absence of conflict as the ultimate aim of conflict regulation, hardly any ethnonationally divided state would qualify as a case of successfully regulated conflict. The absence of conflict cannot be used as an operational indicator of the success of conflict regulation.

Once ethnonational tensions have occurred they will affect future relations between the opposing groups. No regulation or pacification will succeed in turning the clock back. In this sense, conflicts can never be "resolved" or ended in an absolute sense. The conflictual acts which occurred during the tensions will continue to affect and colour interactions between the groups, even if pacification has decreased the intensity of the dispute. Settlements cannot efface previous conflictual acts, nor will every source of friction be brought to a mutually fully satisfactory outcome in an agreement. The heritage of past conflictual acts and the remnants of dissatisfaction on one or both sides will often contain the seeds of future conflict between ethnonational groups. Settlements may decrease the amount of overt hostility or violent interaction, but they will never end or bring about the disappearance of conflict.

Strategies aiming at the annihilation of conflict between (ethnonational) groups are unrealistic and often even undesirable. It could be argued that inter-group conflicts are a perfectly normal and essential feature of politics. If societies consist of different individuals organized in different groups, it is likely that these groups will develop dissimilar sensitivities, needs and preferences, which are a corollary of their group or individual differences. The institution which, following the formulation of dissimilar interests, processes these different interests into a common policy outcome, is the state. The creation of policy outcomes applicable to all involves high stakes, divergent interests and intense competition between these group interests, often resulting in disagreement and conflict. In the policy process, the competing groups resort to a number of coercive, persuasive, bargaining and other tactics to achieve their desired outcome. The heated competition to determine policy outcomes clearly involves conflictual relations. It is commonplace to portray conflictual relations in politics as detrimental, dysfunctional and counterproductive to the functioning of a political system. All too often there is a tendency to overlook the fact that these conflicts identify the relevant issues, they clarify the sensitivities and importance attached to these issues by societal players and they also illustrate the power balance between groups. In this respect, conflicts are an essential and even a functional feature of politics, allowing the production of realistic, balanced and sensitive policy. The point here is that the goal of conflict regulation cannot be the disappearance of conflict. Conflicts are a normal and functional corollary of group differences. Conflict-regulating strategies should aim at controlling and orienting the conflict towards stable outcomes, rather than investing in the creation of conflict-free environments.

The proposed view – that conflicts are part and parcel of political decision-making – should not be interpreted as an unqualified plea for the uncontrolled proliferation of conflicts. Ten-sions and conflicts often escalate and lead to highly sub-optimal outcomes or even to the collapse of the

policy-making institutions. Regulatory strategies should focus on avoiding such detrimental escalation by stimulating the recognition and acceptance of divergent interests as the starting-point from which differences can be processed into stable policy outcomes. Conflict regulation techniques will not succeed in resolving conflicts, but will at best manage to channel damaging tensions towards outcomes which allow for the coexistence of competitive groups. Having reduced unwarranted expectations of the capacity of regulatory acts to end conflict, we now propose the following definition: *the successful regulation of internal conflicts occurs when group dissatisfactions and opposing interests are confronted and addressed in a political system and conflicting demands are subsequently processed, at the lowest possible cost and risk, into stable policy outcomes.* Some elements of this definition of conflict regulation require closer scrutiny. First, regulation requires dissatisfactions to be voiced and responded to by the conflicting parties. Without clear statements of group discontent, there is little to which regulatory techniques can be applied.

If the deprived group fails to mobilize (for lack of organizations, infrastructure, communica-tion, etc.), it may not be effective in putting forward demands. Once grievances have been voiced, the group in relation to which the discontent is expressed needs to recognize and attend to the problem. This is certainly not always the case, as the (dominant) group, to which demands are addressed, can choose to ignore or deny the existence of this dissatisfaction. By denying the existence of a conflict, the (dominant) group legitimizes its lack of response and avoids taking any policy steps designed to reduce the dissatisfaction. These two conditions for successful conflict regulation are often lacking. Conflicts may seem to have been pacified, but the apparent calm is merely due to the failure of dissatisfied groups to put forward their demands or the result of a (dominant) group's preferring to deny the existence of a problem for as long as it can.

Second, successful conflict regulation involves the processing of conflicting demands at the lowest possible cost and risk. It is not possible to indicate precisely the point at which conflicts are processed at the lowest cost and risk. Such operationalization requires quantifiable indicators of costs and risks and a thorough understanding of how the conflicting parties assess these costs and risks. The general notion of lowest possible costs proposed here is that the amount of resources, time and energy devoted to dealing with the conflict does not interfere with the successful formulation of other policy outcomes. Conflict regulation can be deemed successful (where all the other conditions are met) if the cost of dealing with the conflict does not hamper the policy-making capacity of the political system. The regulation of a conflict can drain a substantial amount of resources, to the extent that all other policy issues need to be put on hold, leading to a policy blockage and the inability of the political system to function at all. Such instances of policy-making overload are failures of conflict regulation, even if they come about without violence. Next to costs, the element of risk needs to be taken into account. The costs involved in regulation may be low while the chances of jeopardizing the continued existence of the political system may very be high. If the regulation of conflicts involves bringing the political system time and again to the brink of disintegration and collapse, then the techniques applied are unsuitable for repeated use and, therefore, unsuccessful.

Third, successful conflict regulation should result in the formulation of stable policy outcomes. A stable policy outcome is perceived as one from which none of the parties has an incentive to deviate. There is no incentive to deviate because, in the given circumstances, all the other reasonably possible outcomes could be expected to leave each of the parties worse off. A stable outcome does not necessarily correspond to the full realization of one or both parties' goals. It is likely to leave a residue of dissatisfaction on each of the opposing sides. Despite falling short of a full realization of their goals, both sides can adhere to the outcome and render it stable because

they are aware that the struggle for maximum individual gain leads to mutually inferior outcomes.

Inherent in the above description of a stable outcome is the fact that the stability achieved is unlikely to be maintained indefinitely. Changing circumstances (changing environments, needs, leaders, etc.) can alter and decrease the benefits linked to an outcome, thereby making other outcomes more desirable. Conflicting parties seeking the regulation of their differences should therefore be prepared for an ongoing process of establishing new stable outcomes. Longevity of outcomes can be pursued by entrenching them in institutions. Institutional frameworks (constitutions, bureaucracies, jurisprudence, etc.) tend to reinforce and attribute a certain "robustness" to outcomes, thereby prolonging their existence. Institutionally embedded outcomes can be expected to be more resistant to change, but there is ample empirical evidence that even institutionalized outcomes are not immune to changing needs and environments.

The definition of conflict regulation presented in this paper can be regarded as fairly pragmatic for several reasons. First, the termination of conflict (understood as the end of tension and friction between groups) is rejected as a goal of conflict regulation. The aim is not to abolish conflict, but rather to limit some of its destructive consequences. Conflicts between groups cannot and should not disappear. Instead, conflict regulation should aim to process conflicting demands, at a low cost and low risk, into stable outcomes. In more concrete terms: conflicting groups should learn not to avoid living in disagreement, but to live with disagreement. Second, the definition is not centred on the presence or absence of violence. On the one hand, the absence of violence – desirable as this may be – is no guarantee of successful coexistence. Non-violent conflict situations may be accompanied by high costs and risks and a failure to produce stable policy outcomes, rendering group coexistence fragile or even unbearable. On the other hand, the use of violence does not necessarily entail the failure of conflict regulation.

Law enforcement or the voicing of discontent can take a violent form. Such eruptions of violence do not, by definition, jeopardize the success of regulation or group coexistence. Although the use of violence in conflicts is not a suitable indicator for determining the failure or success of conflict regulation, it is unlikely that violence will be part of a successful regulation strategy, as the use of violent means to enforce an outcome is usually a costly, risky undertaking and leads to hotly contested, and therefore unstable, outcomes.

Joint Decision-Making as the Optimal Approach to Conflict Regulation

Three ways of settling a conflict may be discerned: an external authority can impose a solution upon the conflicting parties, the conflict can result in an outcome through a number of unilateral actions, or the conflicting parties can decide to settle their differences jointly. It will be argued that the latter approach is both normatively and factually the preferable procedure for regulating conflict.

Conflicting parties deciding to settle their disagreements jointly accept that the formulation of a conclusion to the conflict shall be dependent on the agreement of both sides. This necessity for mutual agreement has important consequences for the nature and quality of the decision-making process.

The pursuit of a mutually acceptable outcome implies an interactive process. First of all, the grievances and demands of both sides are put forward. These grievances will need to be addressed if an outcome is to ensue, and this forces all participants to note and act upon the dissatisfactions expressed by their opponents. Moreover, this exchange of information clarifies the

sources of discontent, the relevant issues and the relative importance attached to the matters in dispute. It cannot be assumed *a priori* that the adversaries have adequately assessed the contentious issues. Conflicting parties often have only indirect information regarding how far the opponent is willing to go. One side's sensitivities, intentions and real goals are often uncertain or blurred by their opponent's negative perceptions. Confrontation and the exchange of information and perceptions are instrumental in forging workable definitions of the conflict situa-tion. Joint decision-making encourages conflicting parties to redefine their own positions and, more importantly, to reconsider their perception of the opponent in the light of conveyed information.

Through the interactive exchange of information and the subsequent adjustment of perceptions, opponents gain knowledge of each other's goals and bottom lines. This exchange of information reduces the element of uncertainty in the interaction. The importance of minimizing uncertainty and achieving certainty cannot be overestimated, as certainty with regard to the relevant features of the conflict situation (issues, opponent, minimum demands, etc.) allows for the emergence of mutual trust in the joint decision-making process. Conflicting parties operating under conditions of great uncertainty as regards their opponent's motivation, means and goals cannot be expected to develop sentiments of trust vis-ŕ-vis an unpredictable adversary. The exchange and adjustment of information reduces uncertainty, increases the predictability of the opponent's behaviour and favours the emergence of trust. Conversely, uncertainty in interactions is a factor which inspires feelings of fear and vulnerability – feelings which, according to psychological theory,[5] are highly conducive to violent reactions.

As was mentioned in the introduction, a number of scholars have pointed out the problematic asymmetric nature of most internal or ethnonational conflicts. Generally, the asymmetry can be qualified as a power imbalance, based on coercive, legal or moral grounds, between the dissatisfied group and the incumbents. Such asymmetry is deemed problematic because equals are said to make peace more readily and more easily than unequals.[6] Adversaries seeking conflict regulation through joint decision-making accept, by implication, that settlement can only occur if both sides agree. Joint decision-making, therefore, equalizes the relative weight of asymmetric adversaries in the formula for the final decision.

As unanimity is essential to this formula, both need to agree, so each of them has the power of veto. Joint decision-making entails an equalization of power in the decision which might not be paralleled by equality in the coercive or legal capabilities of the conflicting parties. This equalization of power in decision-making is one possible reason why rival groups reject joint settlements, because their favourable power position on the battlefield is significantly curtailed by the equalizing effects of joint decision-making. In general, jointly accepted outcomes will be less power-induced than those which are the result of unilateral or external (hierarchical) actions. This does not mean that conflict regulation through joint decision-making will be devoid of power struggles or the effects of bargaining power. The degree of dependence, the availability of alternatives, the consequences of non-agreement and the salience and importance of the issues at stake for each of the parties will largely determine the parties' strength in the joint decision-making process. Power relations between the conflicting parties will still be a crucial variable in this process, but imbalances will be partially redressed by their equal share in the formula for the final decision.

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5 L.N. Rangarajan, *The Limitation of Conflict. A Theory of Bargaining and Negotiation*, London, Croom Helm, 1998.

6 C.R. Mitchell, "Asymmetry and strategies of regional conflict", in: I.W. Zartman, V.A. Kremenyuk, *Cooperative Security. Reducing Third World Wars,* Syracuse-New York, Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 36.

Finally, outcomes resulting from joint decision-making will incorporate the minimum demands of each of the parties. Under unilateralism or imposed regulations, there is no guarantee that the needs of both sides will be addressed in the final outcome. The unanimity rule implicit in joint decision-making means that, in order to be mutually acceptable, an outcome should satisfy at least the minimum needs of both parties. This mutual satisfaction of minimum needs renders the outcome more stable than unilateral or imposed solutions, which are likely to give rise to dispute and the re-emergence of inter-group hostilities.

At the start of this section we stated our conviction that joint – as opposed to unilateral or hierarchical – decision-making is the most beneficial approach to conflict regulation. Joint deci-sion-making encourages a full discussion of all dissatisfactions through a clarifying exchange of information, which reduces uncertainty and allows for the emergence of trust. Moreover, the unanimity rule partially reduces asymmetry and guarantees that at least the minimum demands of the opposing sides will be part of a mutually accepted outcome. The inclusion of minimum demands increases the stability of the outcome, as each side receives a share of satisfaction.

Bargaining and Negotiations: The Stuff Joint Decision-Making is Made of

Juxtaposed interests and demands in a conflict situation will not simply dissolve once joint decision-making has been selected as the procedure for regulation. But there is still a need for a painstaking search for an outcome that offers a mutually satisfactory balance between the juxtaposed demands. The process of weighing up these demands and finding ways of rendering incompatible interests more compatible under joint decision-making involves a bargaining process.

As bargaining is so central to decision-making, we shall explore this concept further. A standard definition of bargaining is offered by Rubin and Brown. According to these authors, the bargaining process should display the following characteristics:

> 1. at least two parties are involved in the interaction; 2. these parties have a conflict of interest with respect to one or more different issues; 3. whether or not previously acquainted, the parties are temporarily involved with one another in a voluntary relationship; 4. the essential activity in this relationship involves either the exchange of one or more specific resources or the resolution of one or more issues among the parties (or both); 5. the nature of this activity is sequential rather than simultaneous, in the sense that there is a presentation of proposals or demands by one party followed by the evolution and presentation of counterproposals by the other, until a resolution or impasse occurs.[7]

The above paragraph gives a good description of bargaining, but reveals little of the nature of the relationship which binds bargainers. Negotiations often signal the beginning of co-operative coexistence. Nevertheless, they should not be perceived as a purely co-operative activity. Conflictual attitudes remain an important feature of a bargaining process. Bargaining relations are best understood as mixed-motive relationships. The relationship combines a concern for co-operation with conflictual attitudes. Bargainers are separated by some conflicting interests and linked by some common interests.[8] The conflictual element can be traced back to the fact that

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7 J.Z. Rubin, B.R. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Bargaining and Negotiation*, New York, Academic Press, 1975, p. 5.

8 Kochan (T.A.), Verma (A.). "Negotiations in organizations: blending industrial relations and organizational behavior approaches", in: M.H. Bazerman, R.J. Lewicki, *Negotiating in Organizations*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1983, p. 19.

each bargainer aims at maximizing his/her benefit in the outcome bargained for. The struggle by each bargainer to obtain a favourable outcome, in a context of incompatible interests, entails conflict. Without diverging interests, the parties would not need to bargain – to reach the desired goal, it would be enough to co-ordinate their actions. Despite the conflict-prone configuration of interests, bargaining processes have an important co-operative dimension. The incentive for co-operation comes from an awareness by the bargainers that their goals cannot materialize without the some degree of participation by their adversaries. The parties must feel that goal achievement is to a large extent dependent upon the agreement of the opponent. The combination of co-operative and conflictual stimuli locks bargainers into an almost "schizophrenic" relationship which Schelling describes as "incomplete antagonism" or "a precarious partnership". For an interaction to be defined as a bargaining process, both the conflictual and the co-operative dimensions need to be present. Interactions lacking the mixed-motive characteristics are either open conflict or co-ordination settings which, as Bacharach and Lawler succinctly state, have little bearing on a bargaining situation: "If they had no incentive to co-operate, they would not bargain at all, if they had no incentive to compete, they would not need to bargain". The definition formulated by Rubin and Brown clearly points to the dynamic nature of bargaining. Negotiations are portrayed as a process which can be summarized in a number of subsequent stages. Several authors (Rangarajan 1985, Gulliver 1979) have analysed bargaining processes from this developmental perspective.[9] Bargaining is presented as a sequenced process in which the negotiators move through distinct phases, each of them containing different problems, until a solution or collapse follows.

Though the authors define the phases differently, the sequenced descriptions of bargaining are roughly parallel. For our present purposes, a short summary of the essential bargaining phases will suffice:

1. The initial phase consists in the expression and recognition of discontent. The parties voice their dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs, and this dissatisfaction is noted. Through tacit bargaining, the parties signal and test each other's willingness to commence negotiations.
2. If the discontent expressed is responded to in a positive fashion, indicating that the party addressed acknowledges the problem, the phase of "negotiation about negotiation" (NAN) can begin. During the NAN a consensus on basic attributes of the bargaining setting is sought. This involves decisions about a mutually acceptable arena or forum for negotiations, the agenda, rules about decisions, the number and type of actual negotiators and the acceptance or rejection of preconditions to negotiations. Each of these decisions can be the object of dispute and bargaining. Many negotiations reach the NAN stage but then collapse because of disagreement on the fundamentals of the setting for the bargaining. Often, unresolved disagreements during the NAN phase point to a lack of commitment by the parties to the bargaining process.
3. Once the basic features of the negotiations have been agreed upon, substantive bargaining can take place. The real bargaining usually starts with the bargainers stating their maximum demands and the legitimacy of their enterprise. The aim of the entire process that follows these statements is to bridge the differences between the adversaries. This necessitates an identification of the crucial issues at stake. Negotiations are simplified by concentrating on a number of priority issues. In order to narrow the differences on priorities, initial demands can be redefined in more manageable terms. Another, much-used technique for narrowing gaps in

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[9] P.H. Gulliver, *Disputes and Negotiations. A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, New York Academic Press 1979; Rangarajan, op.cit., 1985.

initial expectations is the exchange of benefits and disadvantages between negotiators. If the bargainers have asymmetrical priority lists, the log-rolling technique can be applied. Log-rolling is an exchange of concessions on issues of differing importance to the bargainers. Each bargainer gets his/her way on one issue in exchange for making a concession on another issue of lesser importance to him/herself.[10]

4. A last and often underestimated phase concerns the implementation or execution of the agreement. This is the stage at which poorly-negotiated agreements often collapse. During implementation, the ambiguous nature of stipulations and a lack of genuine consensus tend to surface forcefully. Agreements usually require re-negotiation and monitoring devices to keep the implementation of the agreement on track.

Turning Adversaries into Co-Operative Negotiators: Stalemate and Interdependence

As indicated above, the factor spurring the opponents to co-operate in bargaining is their acknowledgement that they depend on each other for reaching their individual goals, their awareness that they cannot reach a desirable outcome on their own, without the inclusion of their adversary. The perception that unilateral alternatives are ruled out points to the interdependence of the opponents. The degree and nature of their interdependence has important consequences for the bargaining process.

When alternatives are scarce and the failure of the negotiations is imminent, the negotiators will be confronted with a stalemate. Their commitment to the bargaining process will depend on how they assess this deadlocked situation. In a case of great interdependence (few alternatives and strong probability of stalemate), the evaluation of the stalemate situation in terms of costs and benefits will be determined by the importance to the bargainers of the issue(s) at stake. Bargainers with few alternatives who attribute a high priority to the issue(s) under negotiation are likely to regard a stalemate as undesirable. Bargainers for whom the issue(s) at stake has (have) a low degree of salience will tend to asses the deadlocked situation as bearable.

The degree of interdependence is the basic variable that determines the bargainers' commitment to the bargaining process. Players who feel that they can gain satisfaction independently, or by drawing on alternative resources that do not involve their opponent, have little reason to invest in the troublesome process of finding a mutually acceptable outcome. On the other hand, those who are aware of their mutual dependence have no other option than to commit themselves to negotiations. The failure of negotiations in cases of low interdependence leaves the players to their (unilateral) alternative options. Failed negotiations in conditions of great interdependence leave the players facing a stalemate, since there are no alternatives. A high degree of interdependence thus implies a scarcity of alternatives and a high probability of stalemate in the event of failed negotiations.

The degree of interdependence is thus crucial to understanding any bargaining process. A clear assessment of interdependence indicates the extent to which bargainers have alternatives to joint decision-making in trying to secure an outcome, and it clarifies the likelihood of stalemate when negotiations collapse. Bargaining theory focuses mainly on processes occurring during negotiations (agenda, stages, tactics, concession rates, threats, etc.), but under-emphasises determining features outside the direct negotiations. The extent to which players have alternatives

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10 D.G. Pruitt, "Achieving integrative agreements", in: M.H. Bazerman, R.J. Lewicki, *Negotiating in Organizations*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1983, p. 39.

to bargaining and their appreciation of failed negotiations are elements fashioned outside the negotiations but which have a direct impact on the negotiation.

A number of recent studies in the field of international relations have addressed the question of when conflicts are "ripe for resolution". These studies have investigated the conditions necessary for prompting players to seek a settlement rather than the continuation of hostilities. The generally accepted conclusion is that conflicting players cease hostilities when confronted by a "mutually hurting stalemate". This "mutually hurting stalemate" is defined as "the point where parties no longer feel they can use force to gain unilateral advantage and become willing to consider other options". At this point the parties perceive the costs and prospects of continued confrontation as becoming more burdensome than the costs and prospects of a settlement (Zartman, Hampson, Druckman). The concept of "hurting stalemate" goes a long way towards encapsulating the constellation which promotes bargaining and joint decision-making. Stalemate indicates that players feel they cannot improve their position by continuing the hostilities.

Furthermore, stalemate is supposed to harm both sides, which suggests that the players will not merely cease hostilities but need to invest actively in altering the stalemate. Zartman's concept of "mutually hurting stalemate" amounts to a necessary but not sufficient condition for describing a conflict as "ripe for resolution". A hurting stalemate indicates the point where the conflicting players no longer perceive the continuation of open hostilities as a beneficial strategy. The decision to stop fighting necessarily entails a simultaneous decision to begin co-operating. In a situation of hurting stalemate, unilateral actions merely cease to be a viable strategy – they do not preclude the emergence of other non-co-operative interactions.

Instead of seeking a joint settlement, the players may – and often do – seek to involve external players who can enforce an outcome hierarchically. Or the adversaries may invest in rendering the condition of stalemate less harmful by increasing their self-sufficiency. All too often, players confronted by a hurting stalemate in a conflict develop a capacity to live with the deadlocked situation, preferring to accept a state of inertia than embark on the cumbersome process of settling the conflict jointly.

Though useful, the concept of "hurting stalemate" only partially describes the constellation leading to joint settlement. An additional factor is needed to push conflicting players towards the bargaining table to work out a joint settlement. Beside a hurting stalemate, a perception of great interdependence has to be solidly entrenched in the minds of the adversaries. It is not enough to be blocked in a conflict: opponents also need to realize that their fates are intimately linked and that there is little prospect of this changing in the near future. As long as the conflicting parties feel that the net result of the conflict can be an outcome which does not take into account the position of the adversary, joint settlement is unlikely to ensue. A joint settlement can only occur when the adversaries realize that living with the opponent is difficult, but living without the opponent is impossible.

Two cases of successful conflict regulation – namely, Belgium and South Africa – are enlightening in this perspective. Ethnonational and racial tensions have been prominent for decades in these countries. Though the two countries have not experienced similar levels of violence,[11] these tensions were highly divisive and dominated politics in both countries in recent decades. Despite high ethnonational/racial polarization and juxtaposed interests, both conflicts resulted in a negotiated settlement. There was no outright cessation of (violent) inter-group hostilities, but each settlement produced a stable outcome in the sense that none of the key players (ANC, NP in

[11] The Belgian ethnonational conflict did not produce any fatal casualties, while South African political fatalities run to tens of thousands.

South Africa and Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists in Belgium) subsequently sought to change the fundamentals of the agreement. The analysis of what led South Africans and Belgians to overcome their outstanding differences by working out a joint settlement can contribute to a general understanding of what drives players to joint decision-making.

During the 1970s and 1980s, tensions between Flemings and Francophones increasingly immobilized the functioning of national government. The power-sharing arrangement in force in the national government produced a stalemate whenever an ethnonational conflict occurred. Parity rules, consensus decision-making in the national government and a number of special majority requirements tempered a direct translation of Flemish demographic predominance into a corresponding share of decision-making power. Flemings and Francophones carried roughly equal weight in policy decisions. Although temporary power imbalances occurred between the ethnonational groups, institutionally-geared unanimity or consensus rules precluded the continued dominance of either side. A system based on unanimity decisions (whether *de facto* or formal) and diverging interests is, of course, easily stalled. The unanimity rule implies a right of veto for every participant. Each party has the capacity to stall the process and is likely to do so when interests are perceived to be incompatible. Ethnonational mobilization in Belgium infused decision-making with just such incompatible zero-sum perceptions and this, under the unanimity rule, led to a recurrent stalling of policy-making. The recurrent pattern of government crises and collapse over ethnonational issues during the late 1970s and 1980s led to what Zartman described as a "mutually hurting stalemate".

Similarly, towards the end of the 1980s the South African government and the anti-apartheid movement had reached stalemate stage. The apartheid regime had encountered insurmountable difficulties in containing an increasingly strong and efficient anti-apartheid movement. By the beginning of the 1990s, the ANC-led movement was drawing support from almost every segment of black society (unions, churches, students, women, traditional leaders, homeland populations, etc.). Anti-apartheid mobilization could bring the country to a virtual standstill. The opposition strategy, aimed at making the black population ungovernable, was not without success. The National Party government managed to maintain only limited control over its territory, at very high policing and security costs. The invigorated anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s could corner the regime, but it was still not in a position to overthrow it. The South African government, bureaucracy and security forces still represented a formidable opponent, no longer able to crush the opposition but certainly able to maintain white rule for some time to come. The main conflicting players, the NP government and the ANC, were clearly locked into a stalemate position. The lack of a clear power preponderance on either side limited the potential success of unilateral actions. Two roughly equal sides were at loggerheads, and the continuation of open (violent) conflict was not expected to alter this balance of power in the near future.

As was mentioned before, the concept of stalemate goes a long way towards encapsulating the constellation leading to joint settlement. However, it also overlooks an important feature that was present in the South African and Belgian cases. It was not the mere acknowledgement of a stalemate that drew Belgians and South Africans to the bargaining table. Besides the mutual recognition that the continuation of overt hostilities would merely harshen the stalemate conditions, the conflicting players also realized that they were highly interdependent. The stalemate situation indicated that the existing conflict strategies were counterproductive. A stalemate demonstrates the erroneous nature of current strategies but leaves a number of non-co-operative options open. The realization of interdependence narrows these alternatives down to one single option, namely, a joint and mutually acceptable settlement.

Flemings and Francophones were aware that the only way out of the stalemate would have to be a mutually acceptable joint settlement. The ethnonationally mixed nature of central institutions and the Brussels region, together with supra-ethnonational loyalties to the Belgian state and its symbols, are but some of the contextual features which forced the conflicting players to see their inherent interdependence within the Belgian state. Not only were conflicting ethnonational groups part of the conflict, but they would also have to be integral parts of any reform or new dispensation that sought the regulation of the conflict. A similar realization of inherent interdependence occurred in the South African case.

Here, stalemate between the apartheid government and the ANC-led movement signalled the failure of existing strategies on both sides. In addition, the realization of interdependence fuelled the notion that any new democratic solution would have to incorporate the desires of both sides. The territorial dispersal of whites on South African soil ruled out white secession as a realistic strategy. Moreover, whites were aware that any new political dispensation would reflect the demographical preponderance of blacks in South African society. In short, whites realized that the change from the current strategy (continued racial segregation) could not be outright white separation and would entail a considerable degree of black rule. Under the influence of Joe Slovo, the ANC leadership revised its demand for a direct transition to full majority rule (which would of course be black rule). Like the white leaders, the ANC was aware that, despite its obvious numerical and political strength, it could not "go it alone". The white minority could still block any real democratic transition. Furthermore, white control over the financial and economic sectors would remain a crucial variable under the new dispensation. In short, stalemate revealed that existing strategies on both sides were leading only to a dead end, while interdependence ruled out all other unilateral strategies and pointed to joint decision-making as the only realistic solution to the conflict.

Suggestions for the Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict

In the previous sections, general insights into conflict regulation and joint decision-making have been presented. In this paper, theory is not treated as an end in itself. What matters here is the relevance of theoretical insights to understanding and suggesting approaches to the regulation of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Little reference will be made to the precise empirical elements of the conflict. The emphasis of the following paragraphs is on broad dynamics and general suggestions for improved plurinational coexistence in Georgia and Abkhazia.

Given the problematic, asymmetric nature of internal conflicts, it seems important for the opposing parties in the conflict to perceive and treat each other as equals. Discrepancies in the status of the opponents encourages the weaker side to improve the balance of power in its favour. The lack of equality between adversaries often leads to situations where the inferior side either refuses to negotiate or negotiates while continually investing in extra-negotiational strategies in order to strengthen its position at the bargaining table. Perceptions of equality should not be interpreted as actual equality of resources (military, economic, demographic, etc.) or as a need for purely symmetrical solutions. What is meant here by perceptions of equality is that the adversaries should fully recognize that they cannot impose an outcome upon their opponent.

Low intra-party cohesion and extremist flanking is a phenomenon that has derailed many a negotiation process.[12] The activities of poorly controlled extremist flanks can not only create

[12] Horowitz, op.cit.; Mitchell, op.cit.

distrust and doubts concerning the *bona fide* intentions of the negotiators, but can also significantly jeopardize the satisfactory implementation of a negotiated agreement. Weak leadership control over grass-roots supporters and extremists increases the element of uncertainty in negotiations. It casts doubt on the legitimacy and representativity of the negotiators and on their capacity to reciprocate concessions and, most importantly, it invites scepticism as to whether the opponent can and actually will live up to the agreement during its implementation phase. Many agreements falter during implementation, the phase where general, often ambiguous, stipulations need to be translated into concrete measures. Implementation will forcefully bring to the fore any lack of consensus there may be in agreements concluded under duress or clouded by imprecision. It is clear that during implementation, which is a highly sensitive phase of conflict regulation, intra-party rivalry and extremist flanks can hamper the appropriate execution of an agreement to the point of derailing the entire settlement process. It is therefore imperative that both the Georgian and Abkhaz governments acquire full control over their internal forces. Disparate actions by the Abkhaz militia and unco-ordinated incursions by armed IDPs (internally displaced persons) into the Inguri security zone feed distrust at the bargaining table and hinder the co-ordinated implementation of agreements.

Conflict regulation strategies should aim at the formulation of stable outcomes. In a previous section, joint decision-making was singled out as the most efficient strategy for achieving such stability. This is based on the principle that an agreed outcome is likely to incorporate demands from both sides. The opposing parties in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict should therefore accept the idea that any solution to their dispute will require each of them to make concessions in order to alleviate their opponent's difficulties. Exploiting the opponent's short term weaknesses to enforce an outcome may be beneficial for domestic purposes, but an outcome achieved in this way is unlikely to remain uncontested in the future. There can be no clear winners or losers in joint decision-making. A clear designation of victorious or defeated negotiators is the most fertile soil for revanchist conflict in the future. The Abkhaz quest for a political status as close as possible to independence is a maximalist strategy that does not take into account Georgian concerns. The Georgian insistence on the return of refugees and IDPs prior to an overall political settlement, meanwhile, disregards basic Abkhaz anxieties.

None of the strategies cited constitutes an adequate basis for successful joint decision-making, because they each aim at maximizing individual benefits, whereas the prime concern should be the establishment of a joint benefit. As long as the conflicting parties merely put forward their own demands without consideration for their opponent's position, interactions will retain a purely competitive rather than a problem-solving quality.

The above suggestions essentially amount to attitudinal and strategical changes which should ideally be thoroughly instilled into the adversaries at the outset of the negotiations. These suggestions have to do with a problem-solving disposition prior to joint decision-making. Interactive dynamics occurring during the settlement process are at least as important as the *a priori* disposition of the adversaries. The numerous reports by the United Nations Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia give a rather gloomy picture of the dynamics during this settlement process. Despite a number of meetings and (partially- or non-implemented) agreements between the opposing parties, hardly any real progress seems to have been made towards a comprehensive settlement. Although the meetings between the Abkhaz and the Georgians have been described as negotiations, it is this writer's opinion that hardly any real bargaining has taken place. The trading of benefits and concessions and the exchange of proposals and counterproposals, which Rubin and Brown identified as the key characteristics of bargaining settings, have not developed in the Abkhaz-Georgian talks. It appears that the negotiation process has come to a halt at the

NAN phase (negotiations about negotiations). Negotiations have been hampered by disagreement over the elementary features of the setting for the negotiations. Dissension arose over typical NAN issues, namely, the composition of the Georgian delegation at the bargaining table[13] or the question of whether to refer in the title of the negotiations to the "conflict in Abkhazia" or the "Abkhaz-Georgian conflict".[14]

Furthermore, in none of the talks has there been a genuine consensus on the composition and ordering of the agenda items. The Abkhazians insisted on a political settlement before the return of the IDPs and refugees; the Georgians sought to address these items in the reverse order. The Abkhazians demanded a discussion of the terms of their sovereign status (an independent or confederal state) and rejected the examination of anything short of outright sovereignty; while the Georgian negotiators refused to consider the Abkhaz agenda and insisted that arrangements going beyond an autonomous or federated status for Abkhazia could not form the basis of the negotiations. The talks that followed the unresolved agenda disagreements lacked the indispensable interaction of give-and-take and fell short of genuine consensus. Each side confined its bargaining activity to a repeated submission of its own demands and a subsequent refusal to yield.

Despite the very clear stalemate in the conflict, the conflicting parties did not succeed in starting substantive bargaining. This stalemate is surely one that hurts both sides. Georgians are left with about 260,000 refugees whose continued presence is a serious burden on Georgia's economic recovery. Abkhazia finds itself under an economic blockade and virtually cut off from the outside world, which refuses to recognize an Abkhazian state outside Georgian state borders. Yet the "mutually hurting stalemate" does not seem to be pushing the parties to regulate their differences. It is this writer's view that there are three principal reasons which have kept the adversaries from genuinely seeking conflict resolution, in spite of a prominent "hurting stalemate": 1. insufficient acknowledgement of interdependence 2. failure to recognize and act upon the opponent's underlying position, and 3. the absence of an emergent political formula which could constitute a way out of the conflict. None of these three causes of the impasse is fixed or static. Each of them can be remedied so as to stimulate more effective efforts at regulating the conflict.

The denial of the inherent Georgian-Abkhazian interdependence is especially prominent on the Abkhaz side. The Ardzinba government mainly focuses on unilateral strategies (referendums, elections, the drafting of a constitution, the return of the diaspora) in an attempt to consolidate the independent status of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz side seems to view continued coexistence with Georgians within Georgia as the least desirable option. According to a senior Russian diplomat, the Abkhaz agenda could be summarized as "to freeze the situation, as happened in Cyprus, allowing time for a return of the Abkhaz diaspora and for the immigration of North Caucasians. Putting the situation on hold for the long term would have the further advantage of gradually accustoming the international community to the fact of Abkhaz independence".[15] In summary, the Abkhaz side seems to be under the impression that a future without Georgia (and Georgians) is feasible, so they dismiss the notion of Abkhaz-Georgian interdependence. The numerous,

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13 Report on the First Meeting of the Group of Experts Responsible for Preparing Recommendations on the Political Status of Abhkazia, Moscow, 15 and 16 December 1993, submitted by Professor Giorgio Malinverni, Chairman of the Group of Experts, to Ambassador Edouard Brunner, the Secretary-General's special envoy to Georgia.

14 S.N. MacFarlane, L. Minear, D. Shenfield*, Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case-Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, Occasional paper of the Watson Institute: Brown University, Providence, 1996, p. 73.

15 Statement by a senior Russian diplomat cited in ibid., p. 57.

unanimous UN resolutions in support of Georgia's territorial integrity and the Russian-Georgian blockade are all measures designed to prevent Abkhazia from pursuing an independent, unilateral strategy. Moreover the future of an independent Abkhazia under a newly enforced blockade, internationally isolated and with a large group of increasingly hostile IDPs at its borders, does not seem all bright by any standards. So far, attempts to prevent Abkhaz unilateralism have been expressed in a negative, sanctioning vein. There also needs to be more insistence on confronting the Abkhaz side with the cost of its *de facto* independence and the benefits and rewards of accepting its interdependence. Instead of merely using penalties as a stick, Georgia and the international community could offer more political and economic carrots to attract Abkhazia to a negotiated solution. This combination of positive and negative sanctions should not, however, be used to pressurize the Abkhazians into endorsing the Georgian proposals, but merely to end unilateralism and to produce a more compromise-oriented Abkhaz bargaining strategy.

A lack of political will to act upon the opponent's underlying positions can be found on both the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides. The combined Georgian proposals for a return of the IDPs and a federal state, as they now stand,[16] seem very generous but actually offer very little to allay deep-seated Abkhaz fears of Georgian domination. The rigid Abkhaz bargaining stance seems to be fuelled by a strongly held sense of demographical and cultural insecurity. Abkhaz references to the fate of the vanished Ubykh people (the last Ubykh language speaker died in 1994), who populated the Russian Black Sea coast,[17] are a very clear indication of the primordial Abkhaz fear of extinction. Georgian settlement proposals should offer the Abkhaz the most solid guarantees possible of their continued demographic and cultural survival. The Georgian federal proposals do not provide such guarantees. Even in an asymmetric federal arrangement with considerable autonomy for Abkhazia, it is unclear how an Abkhaz political elite could retain control over its territory if Georgian refugees and IDPs returned. The return of the IDPs and a federal arrangement could simply result in the ethnic Abkhazians (17% of the Abkhaz population in 1989) again becoming a regional demographic and political minority. Federal autonomy for the Abkhaz region, repopulated by the IDPs, would thus amount simply to autonomy status for a region that was politically controlled by a Georgian population. The protection of ethnic Abkhazians would then depend solely on the goodwill of the Georgian elites. Given the violent events of the past, it is not surprising that Abkhazians reject this option. The formulation of a mutually acceptable outcome will thus require a search for problem-specific arrangements that provide real guarantees for the ethnic Abkhazians. A first step towards such solutions would be a Georgian acknowledgement of the Abkhaz fear of extinction.

Abkhaz demands for an independent or confederal state also disregard the Georgians' underlying goals. There is a consensus among observers and the international community that the current state of affairs, with tens of thousands of IDPs outside Abkhazia, is an abnormal and untenable situation that cannot be perpetuated. The Abkhaz reluctance to accept significant numbers of refugees and their vision of Abkhazian statehood indicate a total disregard for Georgian concerns. Clearly, the Abkhaz proposals include just as many guarantees for the protection of returned Georgians as the Georgian federal proposals do for the ethnic Abkhaz, that is, next to

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16 Proposals by Georgia on the status of Abkhazia, Georgia. United Nations, Security Council document S/1996/165, 5 March 1996.

17 Liana Kvarchelia, 'Georgia-Abkhazia Conflict: View from Abkhazia', in: Fiona Hill (ed.), *The Caucasus and the Caspian: 1996 Seminar Series*, v. II, Harvard University, J.F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, 1996.

none. In this respect, Georgia's insistence on the maintenance of its territorial integrity is perfectly understandable.

What would be the position of Georgian refugees and IDPs in an independent Abkhazia? In seeking the protection and safeguarding of its interests, the Georgian population in Abkhazia would find itself at the mercy of an Abkhaz political elite. Again, given the recent history of violent strife, this prospect is hardly one that appeals to the Georgians.

In summary, the institutional proposals of both parties have insufficiently addressed the basic goals of their counterparts. Abkhazian proposals in no way accommodate Georgian needs. The Georgian federal proposal of 1996 does not respond to the inherent Abkhazian desire for guaranteed political and cultural survival. The Abkhaz confederal proposal does not offer sufficient guarantees that future conflicts between both communities will not lead to secession. A regulation of this conflict is unlikely to be achieved as long as the parties involved continue to pursue exclusive goals which do not incorporate the interests of their opponent. Instead of a rigid adherence to initial demands and a refusal to yield, a bridging technique could be applied. Seeking regulation through bridging means that neither party has its initial demands met, but a new formula is devised that satisfies the main interests underlying these demands. Pruitt and Carnevale provide an elegant example of bridging: "...as in the case of two people who were fighting over an orange. The problem was completely solved when it was discovered that one wanted the pulp to make juice and the other wanted the peel to put in a cake."[18] In a similar vein, Abkhazians and Georgians could investigate the purposes for which they desire the metaphorical orange. An identification of these purposes could perhaps lead to the formulation of more compatible sets of interests. Bridging would involve a reformulation of the issues at stake, based on an analysis of the underlying interests of both sides. In addition to mutual insensitivity to the opponent's underlying interests, negotiations are seriously hampered by the absence of an emergent political formula that could appeal to both sides. In other words, there seems to be no obvious way of separating the orange peel from the pulp.

The following guidelines may make a modest contribution to the formulation of a way out of the Georgian-Abkhazian impasse. A bridging solution could be based on a federal structure in which 1. Abkhazia has autonomous status, 2. within Abkhazia, territorial units are used where possible, 3. within Abkhazia, non-territorial spheres of authority are applied where necessary, and 4. Georgians and Abkhazians share power in the regional Abkhaz government.

The key element in the above suggestions is that the ethnically mixed parts of Abkhazia would be ruled not by a territorially defined government but by one whose jurisdiction covered population groups rather than territories. For example, the Abkhazians living in ethnically mixed parts of Abkhazia would be under the government of the Abkhaz community, whose authority extended to all Abkhazians in Abkhazia. Those parts of Abkhazia that are relatively homogeneous could be governed by purely territorial governments. The non-territorially defined governments (Abkhaz) could be put in charge of all ethnically sensitive areas (language, education, immigration, security, etc.). Of course, non-territorial government could not, in the nature of things, be used in all fields of political regulation. A number of clearly territorial matters (natural resources, pollution, transport, communication, regional public infrastructure, criminal law, etc.) cannot be governed by non-territorial entities. A vast number of areas of competence will have to be organized on a territorial basis and will require substantial Georgian-Abkhaz co-operation.

Thus a regional Abkhaz government in which Georgians and Abkhazians share power on an equal basis or via mutual veto rights could be considered. An additional guarantee for the

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18 D.G. Pruitt, P.J. Carnevale, *Negotiation in Social Conflict*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993, p. 38.

Abkhazians could consist in a federal constitutional stipulation that any federal regulation (of the overarching Georgian state government) affecting Abkhazia (the entire region) would have to be ratified by a majority of the Abkhaz community representatives (the non-territorial government of ethnic Abkhazians). Through the combined use of territorial and non-territorial definitions, both Georgians and Abkhazians could enjoy considerable autonomy within the same region. In addition, mutual checks and balances and powers of veto would preclude the domination of one group over another.

These preliminary and cursory suggestions obviously overlook a number of practical complications and difficulties. Nevertheless, they could marry the basic Georgian demands with the underlying Abkhazian goals. These suggestions entail the return of the IDPs, and Georgia's territorial integrity would be restored in a federal context. Ethnic Abkhazians would gain substantial self-rule, a disproportionate share of regional government power, and rights of veto in relation to federal and regional regulations affecting their community and territory.

Clearly, it will be up to the warring parties to devise their own solutions to the conflict. The role of foreign experiences and proposals can at best be a source of inspiration – they will not provide all the answers. The most serious obstacle to the settlement process is not a technical, but rather a psychological one. Each side is unwilling to drop its unilateral strategies in favour of an evaluation of its opponent's underlying desires. Without a genuine willingness on both sides to consider the opponent's demands, a way out of this complex conflict remains distant.

Bruno Coppieters

Shades of Grey. Intentions, Motives and Moral Responsibility in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict

Introduction

Moral reflections on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict can focus on five different themes. First, on the legitimization of organized violence and other forceful means applied by both parties to strengthen their political position in the conflict. A reflection on the regulation of violence should focus on the effective use of military force during the armed conflict in 1992-93. The inability of the Abkhaz government to undo ethnic cleansing, and the enforcement of an economic embargo by the Georgian and Russian governments against Abkhazia, would also be covered by moral reflections on the use of force in a political conflict. Economic blockades to break the will of the civilian population and to force their political representatives to compromise or surrender are traditional weapons of war. It is also possible to reflect upon the attempt by the Georgian government to have Russian troops use all the means at their disposal to implement CIS decisions, or to get the international community to enforce some kind of 'Bosnian model'. The escalation of violent conflicts in the Gal(i) region since the beginning of 1998 makes it clear that the cease-fire and the principle of peaceful negotiations, accepted by both sides in 1993, did not rule out the use of force in the conflict. Reflections on the political use of violence would have to cover the entire post-Soviet period.

Second, the overthrow of the democratically elected president Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1991-92 by the political opposition and by the president's former supporters among paramilitary forces may be interpreted in the framework of the philosophical tradition which established a right to overthrow governments that came to power lawfully but govern with gross injustice.[1] This opposition between, on the one hand, a democratically elected president who lost popular legitimacy through his authoritarian and erratic policies, and an "unelected autocrat"[2] who promised to re-establish order and democracy, was decisive for the evolution of the war. At first, Shevardnadze could count only on the paramilitary troops of Kitovani and Ioseliani to resist the troops of the ousted president Gamsakhurdia. The 'interethnic' Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is closely intertwined with this 'intraethnic' Georgian-Georgian one. The decision to get Georgian paramilitary troops to occupy the main communication lines in Abkhazia was said to be aimed at stopping Gamsakhurdia's "terrorist" forces and obtaining the release of Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Kavsadze and other Georgian government officials who had been kidnapped by these forces.[3] Getting Georgian troops to re-establish Georgian authority over the territory of Abkhazia was a further objective of this move. It is far from clear how the Presidium of the State Council, constituted by Shevardnadze and his warlords, discussed the relationship between these two objectives. There is also a debate over whether Shevardnadze had doubts about his troops'

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1 The second sort of unjust government that may rightly be overthrown is one which has seized power unlawfully and which has not been legitimized afterwards by time or the lack of alternatives. cf. Terry Nardin, "Introduction" to Terry Nardin (ed.), *The Ethics of War and Peace. Religious and Secular Perspectives*, Princeton/New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 31.

2 Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl and Melvin A. Goodman, *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze*, London, Hurst & Company, 1997, p. xxii.

3 Ibid., p. 265.

chances of crushing the Abkhaz proclivity for secession. It is generally assumed that he could not have opposed his paramilitary allies without either resigning or being toppled from power, which would have entailed the risk of either a military dictatorship or the return of Gamsakhurdia's forces to Tbilisi and a new civil war. Russian and North Caucasian support for the Abkhaz troops led to the Georgian defeat in Abkhazia. After the Georgian troops had been expelled from Abkhazia, Russia helped Shevardnadze to crush definitively the military supporters of his rival, Gamsakhurdia. Shevardnadze's defeat in Abkhazia was the necessary condition for gaining the upper hand in this intraethnic conflict. In 1998, three years after the final removal of the paramilitary organizations from power and the implementation of a new democratic constitution, the conditions under which Shevardnadze acceded to power again became an important political issue. An attempt on his life in February 1998 by supporters of the ousted president put the question of 'national reconciliation' between the two factions in the Georgian civil war at the top of the political agenda. Political stabilization through such a process of reconciliation may facilitate an institutional solution to the various interethnic and interregional conflicts or tensions (with Abkhazians, South Ossetians, Ajarians, Armenians and Azeris).

Third, moral reflections on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict may focus on the normative meaning, in this conflict, of the right to secession – including the normative dimension of the right to self-determination and the principle of territorial integrity. This issue does not only concern the origins of the war. The long-term possibility of Abkhaz secession is being reckoned with in all negotiations on the federative future of Georgian-Abkhaz relations. The international community's refusal to recognize the Abkhaz government as legitimate or to recognize any border changes achieved by force or unilateral forms of secession, puts the normative question of the right to secession at the forefront of relations between Abkhazia and the world community. This question may continue to be debated even after a peace settlement. There is no reason to believe that confederal or federal institutions will put an end to conflicts of sovereignty or even to secessionist strivings. It may be hoped that debates on this issue in Abkhazia and Georgia will take place in an institutional framework which prevents violent clashes, as is the case in Canada and some Western European countries. The federalization of a common Georgian-Abkhaz state is not necessarily a stepping-stone to secession, but it will not prevent democratic discussions on this issue and it will require ongoing normative reflection on the legitimacy of common institutions.

Fourth, the Georgian and Abkhaz concepts of citizenship and their view of themselves as constituting with 'the other' one single national community (from the Georgian perspective) or two different national communities (from the Abkhaz perspective) requires a moral exploration. The question as to which parts of the population living on a particular territory are included and which are excluded from these concepts of a particular community (the question of who should be regarded as 'guests' or 'foreigners' on Georgian soil or the question of the rights of the Georgian population of Abkhazia to return to their homes) has a clear moral dimension. This moral dimension is also present in the discussion about who should be regarded as a political minority or a political majority according to these community concepts (Georgians as a political majority according to the Georgian concept of a single national community; the Abkhaz as a political majority according to the Abkhaz concept of a national state). The discussions on the content of value-laden concepts such as democracy and federalism are directly related to these discussions on citizenship and nation.[4]

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[4] In the literature, federalism is considered a normative or value concept defining the way in which sovereignty is shared between central government and the federal units, whereas a federation is a descriptive concept which refers to a concrete state structure based on federalist principles.

Fifth, the possible strategies for dealing with the past injustices committed by both sides. A peace settlement implies the need for policy choices, first of all between criminal prosecution or amnesty for the individual perpetrators of gross injustices, and secondly between the need to remember or to forget past crimes. Strategies in other countries which have experienced similar forms of transition have taken a wide variety of forms.[5] The political choices involved are basically moral choices. These questions are at present not at the forefront of the political negotiations, but they will inevitably become more prominent in the future.

All these five themes clearly have to be differentiated. They are inextricably interrelated in empirical reality, but they also refer to different traditions in political philosophy. Each has its own classics in literature. Research on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict within the framework of these various theoretical traditions would require a lengthy analysis, which is not my intention here. I will restrict my contribution to the question – which I consider more essential than a detailed analysis of any of these issues – of whether a discussion of the moral character of the armed conflict could be fruitful in the context of Georgian-Abkhaz collaboration at an academic level. This question led to a debate when discussing the first draft of this paper with the participants of the conference in June 1997. Some participants (and not only Georgian or Abkhaz ones) had strong doubts about whether such discussions could have positive consequences for a dialogue between the communities in conflict. This lack of consensus concerning the importance of moral debates between Georgians and Abkhaz contrasted with the general consensus that the issue of federalism and federative systems (federative systems including both federations and confederations) would be of the utmost importance for a future peace settlement. I would certainly agree that institutional questions must be the main priority in Abkhaz-Georgian collaboration, as I also argue in the conclusions to this book. But does this mean that a discussion on the moral dimension of the conflict would have merely divisive consequences? There was a relative consensus at the conference that the issues of pan-Caucasian integration strategies and the historiography of Georgian-Abkhaz relations would be worth discussing. But why this lack of agreement concerning the importance of morals in confidence-building programmes, despite the overt moral character of the conflict? I am convinced that such a rejection is based on a misunderstanding of the place of morals or ethics in political conflicts and scientific disputes. A process of dialogue between Georgians and Abkhaz on an academic level should preferably include all scientific disciplines – including ethics – and all the scientific traditions represented in these disciplines.

In the following, I will first consider a major objection concerning the relevance of a moral analysis of a political conflict, and then two alternative approaches – that can be found among the contributions to this book – to the explicit inclusion of ethics and ethical judgements in an analysis of Georgian-Abkhaz relations. I want to demonstrate that these alternative approaches cannot replace a moral approach, in particular when the question of political responsibility must be analysed. This question has to be addressed as part of a peace settlement, as can be seen from the question of how and to what extent the right of the Georgian population from Abkhazia to return there should be linked to an assessment of their involvement in the war. In this analysis, I will point out the importance of the concepts of 'intentions', 'motives' and 'responsibility' – which are central concepts in political ethics – for an analysis of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

This analysis will not deal separately with the five broad themes of political philosophy mentioned above, but will refer to all of them. The references to the conflict itself have primarily an

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5 See Luc Huyse, "Justice after Transition: On the Choices Successor Elites Make in Dealing with the Past", in: Albert J. Jongman (ed.), *Contemporary Genocides: Causes, Cases, Consequences*, Leiden, PIOOM, 1996, pp. 187-214.

illustrative purpose for my demonstration and do not attempt to give definitive answers to the moral questions it raises, and which were mentioned above. As is also the case with contributions from 'outsiders' concerning federative structures to be implemented in Georgia and Abkhazia, such reflections have as their main aim to deliver general ideas and principles and to refer to academic discussions which may be of particular relevance to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

According to Michael Walzer, the most effective moral criticism is that made by those inside a community's moral system. Criticism from the outside is likely to be abstract and rationalist, leading to coercion rather than to dialogue.[6] Such criticism of an abstract and coercive discourse on morals is a recurrent theme in the Western philosophical tradition. The ethical tradition is more inclined to refine particular ethical questions than to present readers with ready-made answers. To take the just war doctrine as an example: Robert Phillips has rightly stated that this doctrine should be considered rather as "a series of questions which any moral agent must ask himself when faced with the problem of resorting to force. The doctrine of justified war by itself does not provide adequate moral guidance".[7]

Moral Disputes and Scientific Rules

According to one argument against moral discourses in conflict resolution, the question of right or wrong does not belong in the realm of scientific knowledge. Contrary to empirical or analytical research on conflicts, a moral dispute – so the argument goes – cannot be settled according to universally valid methodological rules. Morals are seen as being based on subjective perceptions, which are themselves based on irreducible contradictions between values and value systems. Conflicts between national communities express opposed hierarchies of collective values and it makes little sense for individual observers to settle or even to express personal judgements on such collective disputes, based on their own value systems.

It is true that empirical research cannot decide how the principle of self-determination or the principle of territorial integrity should be applied in a Georgian-Abkhaz peace settlement. Historians can describe the way in which wars for secession have been won or lost. Specialists in international law can describe how the principle of self-determination has been reinterpreted in the process of decolonization, or how the legal concept of sovereignty is being challenged by processes of integration and globalization. The history of the Yugoslav conflict may teach us how Western governments were divided among themselves on the question of recognizing Croatia's right to secession. Political scientists can analyse the consequences of particular institutional strategies which have been adopted in the past. No deductive analysis from generally accepted principles and no analysis based on historical analogies devoid of moral choices can give an empirically-based answer to the question of how the Abkhazian people's right to self-determination should be implemented. This type of analysis could not even answer the question of how the concept of 'people' should be interpreted. Should the pre-war or the post-war population be considered as the holders of such a right?

The argument that moral issues at stake in a conflict are subjective and cannot be treated according to standard empirical practices is true, but such an argument points to the limits of empirical research on conflicts rather than to the limits of moral reflection. Empirical research may discuss the causes of particular conflicts and the consequences of particular strategies, but it has few means at its disposal to help in taking a decision on the variety of political choices

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6 Nardin, "Introduction", *op.cit.,* p. 17.

7 Robert Phillips, *War and Justice*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1984, p. 15.

human agents may face or, in particular, the moral principles they should follow in conflict situations. Any analysis of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict that excludes the ethical dimension may be regarded as reductive, precisely because it would exclude the opposing hierarchies of values and value systems that are defended in both communities.

As in any case the overtly moral dimension of the war cannot be neglected, it may be important to address it in positive terms. Moral arguments have been and still are being used in the political argumentation and declarations of all parties involved in the conflict. The weapon of moral critique is one of the panoply of instruments used by both protagonists to mobilize domestic and international support. As both parties argue in moral terms, a moral analysis of their arguments may seem irreplaceable, especially as there is a lack of moral clarity concerning their political objectives. It is not clear, for instance, what the moral content of the basic principles at stake in the conflict are. With which moral arguments does the Abkhazian government defend the primacy of the right to self-determination over the principle of the territorial integrity of internationally recognized states? Does this right to self-determination challenge the property and political rights of the pre-war Georgian population? What is the meaning of political freedom and equality in this context? Can equality between peoples only be achieved through independent states? Should freedom be identified with the sovereignty of an independent state, which finds its limits only in international law and in freely accepted commitments? Or should political freedom be seen as the freedom of a community to preserve its identity, which can be achieved in a variety of institutional ways? Clarity here is necessary, as common principles have to be found in the negotiations on a common state. The question of whether the principle of shared sovereignty can be accepted as such a common principle for the Georgians and Abkhaz is still an open one. The same lack of clarity concerning the moral content of the principle of territorial integrity is characteristic of the Georgian discourse. From the Abkhaz perspective, the Georgians are exclusively interested in the Abkhaz territory and in the property rights of their own population, without any consideration for Abkhaz rights over their own homeland.

It may be interesting here to draw a parallel with the American Civil War. Allen Buchanan is the author of a classic work on the moral philosophy of the right to secession. His moral reflections are rooted in American political history. Buchanan considers that there was a basic lack of clarity concerning the moral principles that were at stake in the American Civil War. One basic dimension of the tragedy of this civil war was the fact that "on both sides there was a profound moral ambiguity concerning what the war was really being fought for".[8] It is popularly believed that the Northern side fought for the abolition of slavery. Buchanan quotes Abraham Lincoln to prove that the emancipation of the slaves was not, however, one of the Northerners' primary objectives in the civil war: "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save the Union by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that".[9] According to Buchanan, this lack of moral clarity concerning the issues at stake in the war had long-term consequences for the development of civic rights in the United States. This basic ambiguity surrounding the political conditions under which slavery was abolished in the last century has rendered the civic emancipation of the Black population of America more difficult to this day.

The Georgian and Abkhaz governments are making tremendous propagandistic efforts to defend the principle of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination, while Georgian and

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8 Allen Buchanan, *Secession. The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*, Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford, Westview Press, 1991, p. x.

9 *Ibid.,* p. 1.

Abkhaz scholars are discussing the application of these principles in the context of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In his contribution to this volume, Viacheslav Chirikba focuses his attention on the right to self-determination while Revaz Gachechiladze examines the principle of territorial integrity. It would be interesting if the moral meaning of these principles could be clarified within the framework of academic collaboration.

The political importance of such a clarification becomes particularly clear when we consider two of the most common accusations levelled against the leadership of the two communities. The Abkhaz government is accused of using the right to self-determination as an ideological façade for defending an ethnocratic dictatorship. According to the principle of territorial integrity, the integration of Abkhazia into the Georgian state would – so runs this critique – democratize Abkhaz state structures and cause the present Abkhaz leadership to lose power.[10] The Georgian government, meanwhile, is accused of interpreting the principle of territorial integrity as a means of retaining the possessions of its 'small empire'. Political negotiations will remain difficult as long as those who are responsible for negotiating or mediating use – or even attach any belief to – such accusations. A clarification of the values at stake when debating future state structures may be helpful in dissipating these strong prejudices.

In their contributions to this book, Ghia Nodia and Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi argue that the Georgian attitude towards Western concepts of democracy and human rights is based on an outward conformity, and not (yet) on a deeper cultural accommodation.[11] Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi states in his article that although the Georgian and Abkhaz parties appeal to the principles of international law, these have only an instrumental value for them. Moral arguments and the principles of international law do indeed tend to be used 'ad hoc' in political conflicts, and not just by the Georgian and Abkhaz governments. It is generally extremely difficult – including in Western Europe – to determine the borderline between outward conformity and a deeper cultural accommodation of 'universal' principles. In international law, universal claims are made on the basis of universally recognized values, but this recognition takes place through the ratification of treaties and conventions and not necessarily through acceptance by public opinion.[12] Nor should the fact that political players are more concerned about material interests than about moral arguments lead one to the conclusion that morals may be neglected in an analysis of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Political players always define their 'material' interests within the framework of a cultural idiom, in which moral principles play a prominent role. The cultural idiom in which the political representatives of a particular community operate is decisive for selecting those interests that are to be considered fundamental.[13] The fact that the Georgian government considers 'Western' discourses on democracy, human rights and international law as 'instrumental', as 'useful' in advancing the country's future development, is as such relevant for an assessment of Georgian political culture itself. Such discourses are not considered to be instrumental in all parts of the CIS. I have the impression that the Abkhaz culture is not very different from the Georgian in that respect. Abkhaz archaeologists and historians like to draw attention to the fact that, since colonization by the Greeks and Romans, for long periods in history their country has been at the inner periphery of Western empires and Western civiliza-

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10 Such an argument is to be found in Paul B. Henze, "Abkhazia Diary 1997", in: Mehmet Tütüncü (ed.), *Caucasus: War and Peace*, Haarlem, 1998, pp. 90-107.

11 On this distinction, see Basam Tibi, "War and Peace in Islam", in: Nardin (ed.), *op.cit.,* p. 140.

12 James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*, Princeton, Princeton. University Press, 1981, p. 23.

13 Roger Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood,* Cambridge/Mass., Harvard University Press, 1990

tion.[14] Abkhaz intellectuals feel no less close to European civilization than do Georgian intellectuals. In the contributions to this volume it will be impossible for the reader to find any 'civilizational' clashes between Georgian and Abkhazian views on the nation or on democracy.

Machiavelli rightly stated that moral rhetoric is one of the most potent weapons in international politics and that the ability to convey the appearance of virtue is an indispensable part of the statesman's art.[15] This generally accepted principle has been applied more easily by the Georgian than by the Abkhaz leadership. In recent years, the Georgian political leadership has had the opportunity to adopt a Western discourse on democracy. Its progressive integration into Western political structures since its recognition as an independent state in 1992 has been accompanied by a parallel schooling in rhetoric. Georgian diplomats and statesmen have far less difficulty than their Abkhaz counterparts in playing with formulas that are pleasing to Western ears. Abkhazia's economic and intellectual isolation since the war – following seventy years of Soviet autarchy – and its lack of trained diplomatic personnel have meant that its present leadership has found it very difficult to gain recognition for its positions among an international audience. Well-founded Abkhaz claims would probably be far better understood and acknowledged in international fora if the basic values they wish to defend were set out more appropriately than they have been up to now (for instance, it is not easy for an outsider who is not familiar with the Soviet concept of federalism to understand why the concept of 'autonomy' is not a positive one for Abkhaz officials). By clarifying the moral values at stake in the different issues discussed at the negotiating table, both sides would be able to go beyond a purely instrumental use of moral rhetoric. An intensified Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue which clarified these basic values and principles would be helpful in moving beyond a position of mere outward conformity to universal democratic principles. A common state undoubtedly calls for more than an instrumental use of mutually agreed principles or institutions.

A Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue on the moral values at stake in the constitution of a federate common state is relevant for moral debates in other countries at well. The choice between a nation's view of itself from an ethnic and civic standpoint, as discussed in the contribution from Ghia Nodia, is a universal problem. It constitutes one of the main topics of discussion between political parties in Germany, France and other European countries when discussing access to citizenship. The right to secession, too, has become a prominent subject of discussion in philosophical studies in recent years. The official Abkhaz position favours not independence but rather – taking into account political realities – national sovereignty within the framework of a federated (preferably confederal) state. The nationalist pro-independence current, however, is strong in Abkhazia. Comparative research between discussions on the moral significance of secession and its alternatives for securing a community's basic values may be very relevant to the Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue. Historical comparison may be of particular interest too. When reading about the moral debate during the American Civil War, in an article of Philip Abbott I found a list of arguments which Lincoln used against secession. With the exception of point 6, which describes slavery as an evil practice to be expiated, they are all to be found in present-day Georgian anti-secessionist discourse:

1. The perpetuity proposition: Since the union was created in perpetuity, seceding units have no moral or legal identity separate from the existing republic.
2. The democratic privilege proposition: Secession is a violation of majority rule.
3. The infinite secession proposition: Secession will provide precedents for further secession until all effective government ceases.

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14 Interviews by the author with Abkhaz archaeologists and historians in Sukhum(i) in August 1997.

15 A.J. Coates, *The Ethics of War*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 21.

4. The economic mobility proposition: Secession will severely inhibit economic mobility.
5. The outlaw culture proposition: There is no legitimate cultural claim to secession for those who violate basic human rights.
6. The expiation proposition: Resistance to secession will expiate national guilt for tolerating evil practices.
7. The exceptionalism proposition: Secession is unjustified in cases in which a state is undertaking an extraordinary course in democratic development.
8. The common heritage proposition: Secession will sever an irretrievable and treasured common heritage.[16]

The Neutral Observer

In the discussion about whether moral arguments can have a place in a scientific discussion on the Georgian-Abkhaz war, the position of the scientific observer is an important one. The conviction that scientific analysis should be not only impartial but also morally neutral when dealing with national or ethnic conflicts is widespread. When this ideal of a neutral observer is applied to conflict resolution and negotiation analysis it may, for instance, imply that the observer should start out from the presupposition that all parties involved in a violent conflict are making rational choices regarding the means of promoting their interests and values, and that they have a rational perception of the situational context, even if the conflict situation largely escapes their control. Such presuppositions do not necessitate a particular moral stand on the part of the observer.

The observer could also start out from the contrary presupposition that all parties involved are basing their decisions concerning the use of means on irrational choices, which are contrary to their interests or are based on an erroneous perception of the situational context. In this case too, observers should not feel obliged to take a particular moral stand (even where they would criticize the irrationality of the players). Their observation is independent of the particular values of the players and of their rational or irrational behaviour.

To take a third example: the observer may put forward his or her own practical objectives and turn into a facilitator in the conflict, which does not necessarily compromise a neutral position either. The actual resolution of the conflict with an optimal gain for both sides (a win-win situation) then constitutes the principal basic value at stake, which also confirms the impartial position of the facilitator. Setting aside the moral character of a conflict presupposes that the moral interests of the parties involved are to be treated no differently from their other interests. It is up to the parties themselves to establish a list of priorities in the negotiation process and to start bargaining. It is not relevant in this case if 'moral' interests are considered to be more or less important than 'material' interests. The observer remains completely indifferent to the order of priorities defended by the two sides at the negotiating table. This type of analysis is to be found in the contribution to this volume by Theo Jans.

The observer may also describe moral choices or political attitudes with a moral dimension as empirical observable choices. The ethical analysis is replaced by an empirical description of possible moral choices or of existing attitudes without the observer's actually taking a choice or expressing a moral judgement. Ghia Nodia's contribution is based on such an approach. Unlike the former perspective, this type of analysis highlights the importance of the moral dimension of

[16] Philip Abbott, "The Lincoln Propositions and the Spirit of Secession", in: Percy Lehning (ed.), *Theories of Secession*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 187.

the conflict. In analysing the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict as a clash of national projects he describes his observations as "an attempt to *understand* (author's own stress, B.C.) why Georgians and Abkhaz developed the kinds of national projects they did, and why their visions came into conflict." He clearly does not want to take a position in a dispute concerning the normative value of those projects: "In doing this, I will not question the legitimacy of either group."

Nodia's further analysis deals with the dramatic choices facing Shevardnadze when sending troops to Abkhazia. His analysis of the variety of moral choices the Georgian president was confronted with is linked to an analysis of the complexity of the situation which these choices would affect directly. Each possible choice is related to a particular outcome that, according to Nodia, Shevardnadze could reasonably have expected. The choice of legitimizing the actions of paramilitary troops was not without alternatives, but each alternative choice open to him is related to a predictably even more unfavourable outcome. The main alternative – refusing to support the actions of his warlords – would have led to his definitive loss of power. Shevardnadze opted for an armed conflict and remained in power.

Nodia does not use the – far too strong – concept of 'necessity' to describe this choice, and he is right. The concept of 'necessity' ('necessary choice') is indeed of little value in an analysis of political choices which presuppose a certain degree of freedom. As Michael Walzer writes, in a moral discourse the concept of 'necessity' has a retrospective character, and the apparent inevitability of making a particular choice is in any case mediated by a process of political deliberation.[17]

It may be argued that such two approaches to the moral dimension of the conflict – to set it aside, as in the contribution of Theo Jans, or to describe moral situations in empirical terms, without passing judgement, as in the contribution of Ghia Nodia – are more productive, in a reflection process by the parties involved in the conflict, than moral debates on just ends or legitimate means. Debates focusing on right and wrong may indeed reinforce enemy images. Leaving aside the moral dimension of the conflict (Jans' choice) would make it possible to focus the analysis on the negotiating or bargaining process in which the parties' fundamental (including moral) interests are dealt with, regardless of the observer's moral opinion of what should be done. In acknowledging the importance of the moral dimension of political choices by describing them in detail without, however, passing judgement on their normative value ("understanding positions without judgement on their legitimacy" as expressed by Nodia), the observer has the advantage of standing at a certain distance from the conflict in order to analyse all its facets.

Intentions, Motives and Responsibility

These two types of approach cannot be opposed to a moral analysis of the conflict. The empirical approach which leaves aside the moral dimension of the conflict and the empirical approach which refrains from any moral judgement may in fact complement an empirical approach in which such a judgement *is* made. This does not mean that they can or should be joined in a single analysis. The first two types of analysis enhance our capacity to understand the interests at stake in a conflict and the parties' own view of themselves. A moral judgement – developed in the third approach – goes beyond a theoretical understanding in taking a practical position, but it requires empirical understanding. In his book on just war ethics, Ken Coates pleads for empirical analysis as part of the ethical judgement, as there is a

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17 Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, New York, Basic Books, 1992, p. 8.

> need of empirical analysis in difficult moral circumstances. An accurate, complete and impartial account of the physical or pre-moral structure of the act, eschewing euphemistic and tendentious description and focusing clearly and exactly on its total human costs, is a precondition of sound moral judgement.[18]

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, my intention is not to make a detailed moral analysis of one of the various aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz war but to argue the importance of such an analysis in the framework of Georgian-Abkhaz academic co-operation. In order to demonstrate this importance, I will apply the distinction between intentions, motives and responsibility to the analysis of what I consider to be the major moral issues in this war: the decision by the Georgian leadership to deploy troops in Abkhazia in August 1992 (the accusation of Georgian "aggression"), the conditions under which the Georgian population fled from their homes and the refusal by the Abkhaz leadership to permit their orderly return in a reasonable time period or to discuss seriously the conditions for their return (the accusation of Abkhaz "ethnic cleansing"). It is important to see how Georgian and Abkhaz scholars themselves analyse the responsibility their governments have been accused of. I will base my analysis on the contribution of Ghia Nodia for the first issue and on that of Viacheslav Chirikba for the second.

An understanding of the dynamics of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict implies an understanding of the intentions, motives and responsibility of both parties. The differentiation between the two first concepts is particularly important: *intentions* refer to the 'why' of an action (what is aimed at by the agent), whereas the *motives* constitute the agent's 'spirit' or state of mind (including interests and emotions).[19] To take a concrete example: someone may kill a sick animal out of pity. The intention refers to the aim of the action (= killing) whereas the motives refers to the state of mind in which this action is carried out (= pity). Moral theorists tend to be more attentive to the motives than the intention, which does not mean, however, that the intentions are not relevant. For St Augustine, the real problem in war was not that soldiers sometimes kill intentionally, but that they kill for the wrong motives – that they kill out of hatred and cruelty and not reluctantly, in a spirit of self-defence or in obedience to a higher law.[20]

A further distinction has to be made between personal and political motives. Personal motives for the use of force, for instance, would refer amongst other things to the agent's self-interest (as implied in the accusation of looting levelled at the Georgian paramilitary forces or the accusation that the Abkhaz leadership wanted to remain in power at any cost). Political motives may consist of the readiness to use force either as a means to achieve some good in the interest of the wider community (to achieve the right to self-determination, for instance) or as a means that is forced upon the political leader and the nation. States that initiate wars may emphasize one political claim or another.[21] In the case of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, both parties have invoked the second political claim as their motivation for using force: the Abkhaz authorities have never claimed that they started a war for secession, but rather that the war was forced upon them. The Georgian side has also claimed the right to self-defence (the restoration of order on the entire Georgian territory) as its motive for launching military operations.

Nodia's Analysis of Georgian Motives

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18 Coates, *op.cit*., p. 243.

19 Terry Nardin, "The Comparative Ethics of War and Peace", in: Nardin (ed.), *op.cit.,* 1966, p. 256.

20 David R. Mapel, "Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace", in: Nardin (ed.), *op.cit*., pp. 63-64.

21 Robert W. Tucker, *The Just War: A Study in Contemporary American Doctrine*, Baltimore, 1960, p. 1.

An analysis of the intentions and motives of Eduard Shevardnadze (why he performed a certain action and the state of mind he was in when acting this way) is present in the contribution of Ghia Nodia, even if he does not use or differentiate between these two concepts. He first states that Shevardnadze's individual responsibility is at the same time a political responsibility and should be seen as the result of a broader decision-making process in the Presidium of the State Council. We could add that the premises of the decisions taken by this government were in fact largely supplied and screened by subordinates further down in the hierarchy.[22] The role of Georgian political and military forces, acting in name of the State Council but largely outside its direct control, should also be acknowledged. The process of implementing decisions is, like the process of decision-making, a collective process, for which political representatives, however, bear full responsibility. Nodia analyses Shevardnadze's intentions, and in particular the question whether it is true that the leaders of the Georgian troops transgressed Shevardnadze's orders for limited military operations in Abkhazia and started a fully fledged war which he then had to legitimize, as it was later claimed. He also analyses the attitude of the Georgian population. Nodia states that Georgian public opinion supported the war and the war effort, except for the numerous supporters of Gamsakhurdia among the Georgian population from Abkhazia. These supporters did not want to fight, as they were strongly opposed to Shevardnadze's leadership, despite the fact that for them much was at stake.

This analysis, however, remains secondary to the analysis of his motives. Nodia's personal hypothesis is that Shevardnadze's attitude towards the war was highly ambivalent. It even seems that he did not want the war ("there are serious reasons to believe that Shevardnadze did not want the war to start"), but that the general situation at the time, in particular the fear of revenge by Gamsakhurdia's supporters and of a dismantling of the country through Abkhazian secession, gave him a strong motive to use military force. Opposing the warlords would have caused his downfall, with incalculable consequences including the risks of growing anarchy throughout the country. Nodia would have regarded this alternative as a wrong choice ("The only other option would have been resignation – which would have been a noble but extremely irresponsible act at that point").

Nodia does not intend to express any judgement on individual or political responsibility or to go beyond a precise description of motives. He departs from these rules, however, in stating that resignation by Shevardnadze might have been noble for Shevardnadze as an individual refusing any intention of waging a war, but would have been irresponsible for Shevardnadze as a statesman refusing to acknowledge the legitimate political motives for waging a war (in order to save the state). In Nodia's analysis, the war is not justified retrospectively as a kind of police operation – on Akbhaz territory and against Gamsakhurdia's troops – which got out of hand. The uncontrolled actions of the Georgian troops and their numerous violations of the rules of war are not glossed over as inevitable consequences of any war or as being "involuntary" consequences of the decision by political leaders to use force. The fact that Nodia clearly states that at that point choosing any other alternative than war would have been irresponsible on Shevardnadze's part means that he implicitly departs from an ethics of responsibility in which motives are more important than intentions. This means that in the end it was impossible for Nodia, contrary to what he stated previously, to remain within the bounds of an empirical analysis of moral choices or to avoid judgements on moral responsibility.

This description of Shevardnadze's intentions and motives and of the support he received from the Georgian population in Georgia proper (but not from Gamsakhurdia's supporters among the

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[22] Sanford Levinson, "Responsibility for Crimes of War", in: Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel and Thomas Scanlon, *War and Moral Responsibility*, Princeton – New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 104.

Georgian population from Abkhazia) is important in a discussion on how to assess responsibility. Nodia states on the one hand that *at that particular moment* legitimizing and supporting the war was a lesser evil than resignation (a lesser evil than the probable consequences of resignation: the total disintegration of the country through civil and ethnic wars). On the other hand, he describes a whole process of conflicting national projects, without questioning their legitimacy, but making it very clear that there were alternatives to war if the two parties had had a different political attitude in dealing with each other. This means that there is, in my view, a contradiction between the long- and the short-term perspective in Nodia's analysis. Concerning the long-term perspective, he does not formulate a moral judgement but points out better political choices, while concerning the short term perspective he does formulate a moral judgement and points out that there were no better moral choices. In Nodia's view, the long-term perspective is, however, more important and central to his whole argumentation than the short-term perspective, because Shevardnadze as an individual political leader had only limited choices at that particular moment. In my view, it would be quite legitimate to make not only a moral judgement on the particular choice made by Shevardnadze but also to formulate a more general moral judgement on the legitimacy of the policies of both parties, including their national projects and their readiness to use force unrestrainedly.

I personally doubt that in August 1992 Shevardnadze had any moral problems of a prudential nature regarding the use of force for settling the serious political dispute with Abkhazia. He may have doubted the chances of success of military operations against the Abkhaz government, but the statements he has made in support of Russia's military policies towards Chechnya or in favour of an enforcement of a peace settlement in Abkhazia by CIS or other troops (following the Bosnian example) indicate that he generally does not defend a prudential concept of the use of force as a 'last resort' but rather as a means which may be used in parallel with classic diplomatic methods when it seems that military force is more suitable than negotiations for reaching particular political goals. The fact that the military deployment of Georgian troops in Abkhazia could not in any case be considered an act of aggression under international law (as was also the case with Russia's intervention in Chechnya) removed an important barrier to a more restrained use of force and facilitated the initiation of the war.

Abkhaz scholars would probably dispute Nodia's analysis of Shevardnadze's intentions and would refuse to see his attitude as ambivalent. They would not agree with Nodia's assessment that Shevardnadze would not have been able to stop the war even if he had wanted to, that he may have had understandable motives for preferring to stay on in power rather than to resign, and that his deeper motivation for saving the Georgian state may to a certain extent offset the evil nature of the act of aggression. But I suppose that there may be a more productive discussion between Nodia and Abkhaz scholars concerning the motives behind Shevardnadze's actions than concerning his intentions. They may perhaps also agree with his general assessment that politics do not generally deal with choices between good and evil, but mostly with the choice of the lesser evil. I would expect there to be even more agreement on his description of the development of the conflict over the long term and its implicit assessment that the use of force was not inevitable if other political choices had been made. This possibility – of having a more fruitful moral discussion between Georgians and Abkhaz on the responsibility of their leaders when it is focused on motives rather than on intentions – is in my view a first reason to prefer such a type of analysis.

An analysis of intentions is not necessarily more speculative than an analysis of motives. In the example given above of killing a bird out of pity it is easier to assess empirically the intention of the deed (killing) than its motive (pity). In the case of the origins of the war, on the contrary, it is

easier to assess empirically the motives (including ideological motives and general attitudes of both parties towards the political circumstances and their readiness to use force) than the military and political intentions (the precise objectives of the deployment of Georgian troops in Abkhazia by Shevardnadze). This is the second reason for me to prefer to focus on motives rather than on intentions, in this particular research topic.

The deeper motives of both parties in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict were not so far removed from one another, despite their total opposition in their intentions. This is the third advantage of such a focus on political motives rather than intentions. Nodia describes the Abkhaz nation's deep fear of extinction as the fundamental motive for the actions taken by the Abkhaz nationalist government in the conflict, as the fear that the Georgian state would disintegrate completely was already described as the inner motive for the actions of Shevardnadze (i.e., as the 'spirit' in which he pursued certain intentions). The Abkhaz leadership considered that the decision by the Georgian Military Council in February 1992 – to restore the 1921 constitution in order to emphasize legal continuity with the independent Georgian republic of 1918-21 – constituted a threat to the political status of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz leadership challenged the Georgian-Abkhaz agreement of 1991 which did not allow constitutional changes without a two-thirds majority – which meant the consent of the Georgian representatives in the Abkhaz parliament – by restoring the 1925 constitution for Abkhazia. According to Nodia, this amounted to a "latent declaration of war on the Georgian community in Abkhazia and on Tbilisi, and significantly strengthened the position of those factions in the Georgian leadership who believed that military methods were best in dealing with Ardzinba." This open challenge to the Georgian community by the nationalist Abkhaz leadership did not directly lead to the war but is an important factor in an explanation of its origins and implicitly attributes co-responsibility for the war to the Abkhaz side. The Abkhaz fear of being completely outnumbered by the Georgians then made ethnic cleansing understandable as a desperate move to change this situation. By focusing his attention on Georgian and Abkhaz motives, Nodia reveals important similarities which I would characterize as follows: both parties shared a similar exclusive view of the nation in which the rights of other nationalities were not acknowledged, and both were driven by an ideologically framed fear of extinction and by the fear that current political events could lead to total political defeat if they did not follow a confrontational policy involving the use of force and violations of the rules of war. This negative assessment of the attitude of both parties could, in my view, lead to the positive conclusion that it is possible in principle to remove such motives through a political solution which would give sufficient security guarantees to both parties.

Chirikba's Analysis of Abkhaz Intentions

Chirikba's contribution to this volume, on the question of whether or not the Abkhaz government has implemented a policy of ethnic cleansing, is based on a very different way of analysing political responsibility. Chirikba focuses on the intentions and not the motives of the Abkhaz leadership. My personal preference for an analysis which focuses on motives rather than intentions does not mean that intentions are not relevant to an assessment of responsibility. A complete picture of moral actions requires both dimensions – both intentions and motives are empirically and morally relevant concepts. In the following, I will not discuss the alternative approach taken by Chirikba in general, but only the logical consistency and empirical validity of his arguments, even if I would consider an analysis of the Abkhaz motives for ethnic cleansing (fear of a "fifth column", fear of being made into a minority, fear of revenge, etc., in conditions where mistrust impedes the creation of secure political institutions) to be more productive in a moral assessment of 'ethnic cleansing'.

The political importance of the question of ethnic cleansing should not be underestimated. The forcible transfer of population is a war crime according to Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention ("Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War").[23] Chirikba states that the Abkhaz government had no policy or even intention of expelling the Georgian population from Abkhazia, but that they fled out of panic and fear of the advancing Abkhaz troops, who encountered no further resistance after they had occupied Sukhum(i). In order to support this statement, he quotes the UN report on the Secretary-General's fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations in Abkhazia in October 1993, writing that there it is "clearly stated that most Georgians living in the region between the Gumsta and Ingur rivers had tried to flee before the arrival of the Akbhazian forces". He then refers to Revaz Gachechiladze who, as "a more objective Georgian author", in his book *The New Georgia* would have avoided exploiting the controversial term "ethnic cleansing", unlike the Georgian government's "propagandistic use" of this term.

One of the main problems with the discussion on this issue – should the term 'ethnic cleansing' be applied to Abkhaz policies? – is that there are no historical accounts of the war itself on which Georgian and Abkhaz (or other) scholars would agree. The report of the UN mission which is quoted by Chirikba could be considered a good source. It seems to have checked testimonies as carefully as possible under the circumstances, and it is balanced in accusing both sides of gross human rights violations. But to make a selective use of this document is highly problematic, even in the paragraph from which this quotation is taken. For in fact, in his contribution above Chirikba refers only to the following sentence in the UN document: "After the Abkhazian forces had taken Sukhumi, most Georgians living in the region between the Gumista and Inguri Rivers tried to flee before the arrival of the Abkhazian forces". He then omits to quote the next sentence: "some others who stayed behind were reportedly killed when the Abkhazians took control of villages and cities in Ochamchira region", despite the fact that this sentence is clearly an integral part of the same statement in the UN report. The fact that the majority of the Georgian Abkhaz population fled before the arrival of Abkhaz troops and that "some" among the minority who stayed behind were reportedly killed by those troops is hardly proof that no ethnic cleansing has taken place!

This report refers also to numerous eye-witness accounts which say that the first Abkhaz units entering the south of Abkhazia did not commit atrocities against Georgians, but warned the population that they were being followed by other units who were "engaged in looting, burning of houses and killing. However, nothing appears to have been done to prevent those units from carrying out such acts." The UN report also clearly states that

> numerous killings of civilians were also committed by Abkhazian forces, both during and after armed confrontations. Many of the allegations concern atrocities committed after the Abkhazians regained control over Gagra in October 1992. The mission received information indicating that several hundred Georgians were killed after Abkhazian forces had entered the city. Despite claims that only combatants with automatic weapons in their hands had been killed, there is evidence that most of the victims were no longer participating in combat, and that many others were civilians who had not actively taken part in the confrontation.

The final conclusion of the report – in which crimes committed by the Georgian side are extensively listed – does not deny the existence of ethnic cleansing by either side (the report has gathered sufficient testimonies for strong evidence to suggest this), but appeals for further careful research on this issue:

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23 Jean-Marie Henckaerts, *Mass Expulsion in Modern International Law and Practice*, The Hague/Boston/London, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1995, p. 164.

> On the basis of the information collected, the mission was not in a position to ascertain whether it had been an actively pursued policy of the authorities of either side, at any time, to clear the areas under their control of either the Abkhazian or the Georgian population. Only further careful investigation and evaluation can establish the relevant facts in a conclusive manner.

It would therefore be possible to claim that the UN report did not ascertain intentions of ethnic cleansing on the part of the Abkhaz authorities – but it is surely not possible to use just one single sentence of this authoritative report to prove the contrary.

Chirikba states that the absence of the term 'ethnic cleansing' in a book by Revaz Gachechiladze may be contrasted with the accusations formulated by the Georgian government. It is possible to use the authority of scholars from the other community to discredit their government, but this is not the best argument in a scientific discourse. Authors may quite simply change their mind. Revaz Gachechiladze did not use the expression 'ethnic cleansing' to describe the Abkhaz policies in his previous book, but he has used it in his contribution to this volume. He may have considered that there are now – five years after the publication of the UN report mentioned above – sufficient generally known facts concerning the Abkhaz policies to compel him to use this term.

Ethnic Cleansing

Ethnic cleansing has been defined by Andrew Bell-Fialkov as a "planned, deliberate removal from a certain territory of an undesirable population distinguished by one or more characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, race, class or sexual preferences."[24] Research has been done in both communities on the extent to which such a policy was implemented either during the war by the Georgian side or as the war was ending by the Abkhaz side. This research is based on eye-witness accounts and written sources. It may be useful (despite the psychological difficulties inherent in this task) to compare research results. This empirical historical research should be complemented by a moral analysis. There are indeed a number of moral issues involved in applying the concept of 'ethnic cleansing' to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, and these cannot be solved by historical descriptions of facts, but need to be analysed separately. This analysis should not confine itself to the meaning of the term 'ethnic cleansing' in international law. Moral analysis can define its own procedures in this respect.

The concept of ethnic cleansing as a "planned, deliberate removal" should refer not only to the original intentions of those who planned this removal but to all the elements that are included in a "planned" policy. Unintended but predictable consequences have also to be taken into account. This distinction between intended and unintended but predictable consequences is used in war ethics to assess the consequences of armed conflicts for the civilian population, who, according to the 'discrimination principle', are not supposed to be the immediate target of war operations. The discrimination principle forbids military operations targeted against non-combatants, but considers that under certain conditions the evil effects of military operations on non-combatants are tolerable. One of these conditions is that these consequences are merely foreseen or expected as the outcome of a particularly important and legitimate military action, but not directly intended.[25] The flight of the Georgian population, for instance, may reasonably be expected or even foreseen as the outcome of major military operations by the Abkhaz against Georgian troops, regardless of whether or not this flight was intended. This distinction between intended

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24 Andrew Bell-Fialkov, *Ethnic Cleansing*, London, Macmillan, 1996, pp. 3-4.

25 Robert Holmes, "Can War be Morally Justified?", in: Jean Bethke Elshtain (ed.), *Just War Theory*, New York University Press, New York, 1992, p. 200. For a discussion on this issue see Coates, *op.cit.*, pp. 239-264.

and unintended consequences of military acts takes into account, however, the fact that the unintended consequences of military operations are also foreseen, accepted and thus voluntarily caused. Even if the departure of a large proportion of the Georgian civilian population from Abkhazia had not actually been intended by the Abkhaz authorities (which may be doubted[26]), it remained foreseen, accepted and thus voluntarily caused as a side-effect of planned military operations against Georgian troops. The distinction between intended and unintended actions does not imply a distinction between acts for which the agents are responsible and those for which they are not – it implies rather a distinction between different kinds of responsibility.[27] From the perspective of war ethics, it remains the responsibility of those who have caused the suffering of the civilian population to undo it. According to de Zayas, it makes no sense to speak about the right not to be expelled but at the same time to deny the existence of a right to return.[28] This means that the term 'ethnic cleansing' does not apply exclusively to voluntarily intended military policies of removal or to acts of killing inspired by revenge, but also to voluntary military policies which are not directly intended to remove the population but which accept this removal as an expected side-effect of their actions, without any prospect of remedying it at a later stage. In my view, the term 'ethnic cleansing' is appropriate for describing the policies of state authorities to the extent that these authorities, which have voluntarily caused these departures by their military actions (regardless of whether this fleeing of the civilian population was intended or whether it was an unintended side-effect of military operations), are not prepared to take responsibility for their consequences or to remedy them within a reasonable period of time under appropriate circumstances.

The broader interpretation of the term 'ethnic cleansing' – which would include both intended and unintended forms of the removal of certain categories of an undesirable population from a certain territory, and for which the right to return is not acknowledged or implemented "at the earliest practicable date" (to use a current UN formula[29]) – has two main advantages.

First, it is more easily applicable to the empirical analysis of wars, where it is often difficult to distinguish between intended and unintended actions by political authorities, or between forms of removal of an undesirable population which are ordered by political authorities and forms of removal which are beyond their control. This broader definition is probably more appropriate for historical research. It implies that the unintended consequences of the actions taken by the Georgian authorities who initiated the military operations in Abkhazia in August 1992 should be included in an analysis of the "voluntarily caused removals" of certain sections of the population

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26 The difficulty in finding empirical evidence of the intentions of a government can be seen in Robert Paul Churchill's analysis of genocide. He states that it is often difficult to find conclusive evidence of the intention of genocide but that such evidence can be deduced from the consequences of an act: "Conclusive evidence of a premeditated and planned state policy is too stringent as a standard, especially since governments can lie about their intentions and obstruct efforts to uncover them. For this reason, it is necessary to impute or infer intent from consequences. Thus, genocide occurs when the foreseeable, predictable, and cumulative results of a course of action are the extermination of an outgroup and when a state either produces this outcome or acquiesces in bringing it about by consistently refusing or failing to protect victims, often in contravention of its own legal code." Robert Paul Churchill, "Genocide", in: Donald A. Wells (ed.), *An Encyclopedia of War and Ethics*, *Greenwood Press,* Westport/Connecticut – London, Routledge, 1996, p. 167. It is thus possible to consider war crimes committed by subordinates as being part of the intentions of the authorities if these authorities had been informed about them but had not taken legal action. The failure of a government to protect victims is implied in the broader definition of ethnic cleansing given above.

27 *Ibid*., p. 245.

28 On the following, see Henckaerts, *op.cit.*, p. 183ff.

29 *Ibid.,* p. 185.

and of the political responsibility for 'ethnic cleansing'. The effects of any war largely escape the control of those who start it. This aspect gives war its apparently 'irrational' character and makes the act of starting a war (or a civil war) a decision of paramount moral importance. This means that it is necessary to assess the responsibility of both sides regarding the moral question of the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Georgian population. Here it should be added that an assessment of shared responsibility for the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population does not mean that both parties are equally responsible.

A second advantage of including the right to return in a definition of ethnic cleansing is that in assessing political responsibility it takes into account a longer time frame than the relatively brief period in which the civilian population were actually leaving their homes. According to the Memorandum of Understanding of 1 December 1993 between both parties, the return of all the refugees, as well as occupied homes and properties, was envisaged.[30] The term 'ethnic cleansing' would hardly have been applied to the Abkhaz policies if they had worked in good faith for an implementation of this decision, as this would have indicated that they had accepted responsibility for the negative effects of their military actions on the civilian population by permitting their return. Besides the inability of the two governments to come to an institutional compromise, it is possible to assess directly the intentions of the Abkhaz authorities after the war: their refusal to initiate a dialogue with the representatives of the Georgian population of Abkhazia, their policy of intimidation towards the Georgian population of the Gal(i) region in March and early April 1995,[31] which was brought to a halt under strong international pressure, and the organization of parliamentary elections in 1996 – which aimed at a domestic legitimization of the new state structures, excluding the pre-war Georgian population – are all indications that the Abkhaz government had no desire to undo the intended or unintended consequences of the war for the civilian population.

Abkhaz commentators often point to the Abkhaz tradition of 'blood revenge' to explain the crimes committed by Abkhazians against the Georgian civilian population. A majority of the Abkhaz fighters had lost relatives or friends – often civilians – during the early stages of the war. According to the Abkhazian tradition, all adult male members of a family are held responsible for the actions of one individual and constitute targets of a retaliatory murder.[32] 'Blood revenge' may have been an important motive for individual Abkhaz soldiers in their actions against Georgian civilians during the war. Paula Garb reports

> stories of Abkhazian soldiers who, immediately after liberating occupied territory, committed crimes against Georgian families that resembled the crimes that were committed by Georgian troops against their own families. This can happen after any war, but in Akbhazian culture it is perceived through the prism of the rules of blood revenge and therefore condoned, or at least, not condemned, and the perpetrators apparently are not prosecuted.

The breakdown of law and order caused by the war would have reinforced such practices in Abkhaz society.

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30 See *The United Nations and the Situation in Georgia*, Reference Paper April 1995, United Nations, Department of Public Information.

31 Report of the Secretary-General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, Security Council Document S/1995/342/1, May 1995, p. 6.

32 See Paula Garb, "The Return of Refugees Viewed through the Prism of Blood Revenge", in: *The Anthology of East Europe Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, Autumn 1995, which may be read on the Internet: www.socsci.uci.edu/socsci/personnel/garb/garb.html.

In my view, in defining the different steps for implementing the right to return, a peace settlement between Georgia and Abkhazia has to take into account such Caucasian rules for warrior cultures – but it cannot be led by such rules, as this would mean that in every cycle of violence crimes against the civilian population of a particular community could be legitimized by crimes perpetrated in a previous cycle. The Geneva Conventions and their rule of discriminating between combatants and non-combatants in the laws on war are founded not on the presupposition that specific cultural concepts of revenge and retaliation should be overlooked in formulating universal laws of war – the lawyers who drafted these conventions were very well aware of the persistence of particular customs of war in each culture – but rather on the idea that universal laws restraining the use of force during violent conflicts constitute the only guarantee that peace between different communities may ever be re-established. The condemnation and prosecution of crimes that are committed following the tradition of 'blood revenge' is a precondition for a peace settlement. It is also a precondition for internal stability and the implementation of law and order. Fear of revenge killings has been said to be the primary factor in preventing a more ruthless crackdown on abductions in Chechnya. On 30 June 1998, Chechnya's Sharia court ruled that blood feud murders were illegal and punishable by the death sentence.[33]

The lack of progress in the political negotiations also needs to be assessed in this analysis of ethnic cleansing. The inclusion of the right to return in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights poses a particular problem when it has to be applied not to individuals asserting an individual right but directly to large masses of people.[34] The criterion of political practicability is generally included in an implementation of this right. The failure of both governments to find an institutional solution to the question of the political status of Georgians in Abkhazia and of Abkhazia in a common state means that here too there is a problem of shared political responsibility for undoing ethnic cleansing.

In discussing this issue with Abkhazians, and in particular with high-ranking officials in Abkhazia, it has always struck me that many of them do not have a clear concept of the principle of discrimination between combatants and non-combatants, in particular where the right to return is concerned. The existence of this principle is not denied, but the concept of innocent non-combatant is often interpreted as moral or political innocence. According to the discrimination principle in war ethics – a principle which has been adopted in the Geneva Conventions – non-combatants are to be understood as 'not *nocentes*' (not harming), as not directly or actively engaged in military operations. This concept of innocence should be clearly distinguished from moral innocence.[35] Innocence should not be 'descriptive of the agent's interior moral state'. 'Harmless' does not mean 'blameless'.[36] Interpreting the term 'non-combatants' in the principle of discrimination in the form of moral or political innocence would render all the citizens of a state that was seen as fighting an unjust war liable to attack and would lead to 'total war', undermining all attempts at discrimination and at establishing laws of war.[37] The identification of 'innocent non-combatants' with 'blamelessness' or with 'moral or political innocence' would bring Abkhazia back to the old Stalinist tradition of 'collective guilt'. According to the Fourth Geneva Convention – which sets out the rights of the population after a war – even those who are suspected of

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33 RFE/RL Newsline, vol. 2, no. 125, Part I, 1 July 1998.

34 On the following, see Henckaerts, *op.cit*., pp. 183ff.

35 John Finnis, "The Ethics of War and Peace in the Catholic Natural Law Tradition", in: Nardin (ed.), *op.cit.,* p. 27; Jeff McMahan, "Realism, Morality, and War", in: *ibid*., p. 88.

36 Coates, *op.cit*., p. 235.

37 *Ibid*., p. 234.

activities hostile to the interests of the state have the right to be given a fair trial and to be treated with humanity.[38]

The attitude of the Abkhaz government towards the right to return of the Georgian refugees is essential for an evaluation of its capacity to defend universal human rights. As de Zayas puts it, the

> inalienable human right to life and the right to liberty must be understood in a concrete time-and-place sense. Indeed, one lives and one enjoys liberty sometime and somewhere, and this *somewhere* is usually the land where one was born, where one married and had children, (...) it should be remembered that a human being is not an object that governments can arbitrarily move across a map. The transplantation of peoples deeply rooted in the land and social milieu of one country brings with it not only physical discomfort and economic loss but also moral and psychological shock which may permanently ruin the lives of persons who are unable to adjust to a new and perhaps inhospitable environment.[39]

It should be added in this context that the Georgian government has defended the discrimination principle only to a limited extent insofar as the civilian population from Abkhazia is concerned. The UN document quoted above refers to the many gross human rights violations perpetrated by Georgian troops during the 1992-93 war. The embargo against Abkhazia did not affect the transport of medical or other basic supplies to that region, which received assistance estimated at almost US $17.5 million in 1997 and a suspected substantially higher amount in 1998. This represents more per capita international humanitarian aid than Georgia received, but the lack of economic development and of sufficient resources to fund basic social services (such as education) has hit the civilian population hard. It is to be hoped that the creation of a Co-ordinating Council in November 1997 and the implementation of a policy of economic co-operation will put an end to this policy of hurting the civilian population in order to induce its representatives to compromise. The creation of this Co-ordinating Council has been said to mark a turning-point in the negotiations. This may be true from the perspective of the discrimination principle, if it proves possible to set up co-operation aimed at the welfare of the civilian population irrespective of any power struggle.

Dealing with the Past I: Individual Responsibility

A peace settlement between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities will have to find a political solution to the problem of how to deal with individual responsibility for war crimes. One possible option is to consider that only a society which has fully come to terms with its past through prosecuting the perpetrators of gross human rights violations can satisfy the sense of justice of the victims and their relatives, and give the population sufficient security guarantees that nothing like this will ever happen again. If perpetrators of human rights violations know that they will be protected after committing a crime, future perpetrators may feel secure in committing the same crimes or obeying authorities who give them orders to do so. Criminal prosecution would also be helpful in preventing some victims or their relatives from resorting to private forms of vindictive justice in the tradition of 'blood revenge'. Prosecution performs a moral educational function which can last for several generations. Such a long-term perspective is important in the case of ethnic conflicts, as gross human rights violations (such as ethnic cleansing) are often legitimized by victimizations and atrocities from earlier times. In cultures that have been affected by severe

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38 See Henckaerts, *op.cit*, pp. 140ff.

39 Quoted in: *ibid*., p. 186.

ethnic conflicts, there are long-term cycles of victimization in which the perpetration of aggression is ensured by a former victimization and in which every community feels itself to be a victim.[40] It may be argued that such prosecutions can re-ignite ethnic conflicts, even if they are initiated under conditions of a fair trial attended by international observers. The manifold experiences in this field in recent decades show that there are no clear-cut solutions. It is part of the negotiation process to find a political solution which appeals to the sense of justice of both communities.

The major problem in such negotiations is undoubtedly the question of political responsibility for war crimes and other gross human rights violations. There is a real dilemma involved in this political choice: from a political point of view, there is no point in negotiating if both parties are not willing to construct a common framework in which both elites would find their place. From a moral and political point of view, however, there is a risk that a negotiated settlement may leave those politically responsible for major crimes untouched and that the population will therefore not regard the peace settlement as fair. A lack of legitimacy in political agreements may cause an already frail construct to collapse altogether.

It is far from clear how the two governments want to settle this question, although the political leaders of both communities recognize the importance of finding a solution to the issue. An analysis of experiences of a negotiated settlement in other countries may be helpful in this respect. It is possible to distinguish four political strategies for dealing with the past: 1. criminal prosecution of the individual perpetrators and those politically responsible; 2. lustration or disqualification of those politically responsible for crimes, including the loss of political and civil rights; 3. granting of an unconditional amnesty; 4. a truth commission which investigates past events in their full complexity and officially acknowledges the injustices committed, without, however, prosecuting and punishing ('amnesty without amnesia').[41] It is possible that the Georgians and Abkhaz may opt for a fifth strategy, if they think that constituting a common state through a peace settlement may entail setting up a different legal system for Abkhazia than for Georgia, but the knowledge of the problems and consequences of the previous strategies should not be simply dismissed.

Academic co-operation between researchers from Georgia and Abkhazia could focus on the way individual responsibility has been assessed in other countries and on the formal rules and procedures which should be followed in the Georgian-Abkhaz case. The fact that most of those involved on both sides recognize that crimes have been committed on both sides, and that only formal procedures can deal with these crimes, is in my opinion a good sign for such co-operation.

One of the most interesting experiences in this respect is probably the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.[42] This belongs to the fourth strategy described above. Those who conceived this commission started out from two presuppositions. First, past tensions, if left unresolved, could lead to new conflicts in the future. Second, it would be difficult to punish the perpetrators without touching those who had given the orders. Given the negotiated character of the transition from white to majority rule it would have been impossible to try and punish all those responsible. The commission, which included both blacks and whites, first had to find out the truth concerning the horrors perpetrated under the apartheid regime, then it had to compensate victims and finally – and this was to be the most controversial aspect in the eyes of the public – it

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40 On the following, see Ronald D. Crelinsten, "Prosecuting Gross Human Rights Violations from the Perspective of the Victim", in: Jongman (ed.) *op.cit*., pp. 175-185.

41 On these four strategies, see Huyse, *op.cit*., pp. 187-214.

42 On the following, see *The Economist*, 1 November, 1997.

had to pardon the perpetrators in order to achieve national reconciliation. This approach to past injustices makes it possible for the injustices to be clearly and officially acknowledged and for the perpetrators – even those at the highest level in the state hierarchy – to be confronted with their deeds and victims. Critical self-reflection is laid down as a precondition for reconciliation.

Dealing with the Past II: Responsibility of States

Murdering, raping, looting and other acts which the Georgian and Abkhaz troops have been accused of, and which contravene the laws, rights and duties of war as codified in the Geneva Conventions, engage the political responsibility of the Georgian and Abkhaz authorities. The lack of governmental control over the actions of Georgian or Abkhaz troops is an important factor in assessing individual responsibility, but it does not alter the responsibility of the two states. The burning of the Abkhaz historical archives in Sukhum(i), for instance, is a crime which involves the responsibility of the Georgian state and for which reparation is due.

Post-war German leaders did not refuse to take up the heavy burden of recognizing their state's responsibility for the consequences of the crimes that were committed under the nazi regime in the name of the German Reich. This did not at all imply personal responsibility on the part of German leaders or their personal implication in the nazi crimes. West Germany took this position immediately after the war, and the communist regime in the GDR considered the option of paying compensation to Israel at the end of the 1980s, shortly before its fall (despite the fact that Erich Honecker and other communist leaders were victims of nazi repression). The West German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, who had himself participated in the resistance to the nazi regime, always defended an unambiguous position with respect to the responsibility of the German state. This attitude was crucially important for the reconciliation between Germany and Poland in the 1970s and has facilitated the acceptance of the German state by international public opinion as 'another Germany'. Japan, on the contrary, has always had the greatest difficulty in acknowledging full responsibility for the deeds of its army in occupied territory, and this remains a major stumbling-block in its relations with China and Korea. Turkish-Armenian relations have up to now been bedevilled by the question of the responsibility of the Turkish state for the genocide of Armenians at the beginning of this century. France has only very recently (after the death of President Mitterand) reconsidered whether the responsibility of the French state was involved in the actions of the collaborationist Vichy regime in deporting Jews from France. During a visit to Africa in 1998, Bill Clinton apologized for America's role in the slave trade. After the Labour victory in the recent British elections, prime minister Tony Blair expressed regret to the Irish for the potato famine, but the lack of an apology for the Amritsar massacre still sours Britain's relations with India.[43]

The question of how a government should deal with the state's responsibility is a normative one, which can only be decided at the domestic level. In the case of Germany and Britain, it seems to have been based on a conscious decision to facilitate reconciliation after past conflicts. Japan refused for a long time, and hesitantly started to take similar steps only some years ago. Whether Georgia is prepared to recognize its responsibility remains an open question. In recent years, the Georgian side has appealed for the establishment of an international criminal tribunal to deal with so-called 'hard core' crimes, such as genocide, that pose a threat to the international community,[44] but this was done in order to increase international pressure on the Abkhaz

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43 *The Independent*, 24 May 1998.

44 United Nations Security Council, 3535th Meeting , 12 May 1995, UN Document S/PV.3535.

government. The Georgian delegation at the Geneva negotiations of 15-18 November 1994 did, however, acknowledge partial responsibility for the war (but not for starting it) in a memorandum issued at the end of the negotiations. According to this memorandum,

> errors on the part of the military leadership of the Republic of Georgia gave the separatists an opportunity to unleash an armed conflict involving thousands of mercenary soldiers from the Northern Caucasus and other parts of Russia and the most advanced military equipment. A proper evaluation of the war has yet to be made, but already the question of responsibility is on the agenda in Georgia. Unfortunately, similar steps are not being taken by the Abkhaz side.[45]

Eduard Shevardnadze has also stated that his predecessor, Gamsakhurdia, made serious errors in his policies towards South Ossetia. Similar self-criticism of his own policies towards Abkhazia is probably more difficult to express, especially in the present circumstances. It is certainly extremely difficult for Georgians to acknowledge their own responsibility before the Abkhaz government attempts to make amends for ethnic cleansing, but mutual steps in this direction, within the framework of peace negotiations, should not be ruled out. They could also be part of a confidence-building programme. There have been proposals to have a common Georgian-Abkhaz programme at NGO level to reconstruct the historical archives of Sukhum(i) by providing photocopies from Georgian archives and other practical support.

The present contribution has avoided dealing with the – albeit considerable – moral responsibility of the international community in the conflict.[46] I will merely conclude here with the remark that the attitude of the Western and Russian governments is not always very helpful in supporting Georgia and Abkhazia's efforts to come to terms with their past. UN Security Council resolutions and discussions refer exclusively to the responsibility of the Abkhaz government for the deadlock in the negotiations and for the inability of the Georgian refugees to return to their homes. As may be clear from the contributions to this volume, and contrary to the practice of the UN Security Council, responsibility for the war and the lack of progress in negotiations should not be unilaterally assigned.

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45 UN Document S/1994/1333 (23 November 1994).

46 On this issue see my contribution "Georgia in Europe: The Idea of a Periphery in International Relations" in: Bruno Coppieters, Dmitri Trenin and Alexei Zverev, *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London, Frank Cass, 1998, pp. 44-68.

Conclusions by the Editors

Bruno Coppieters

It is not a usual practice for an editor to conclude his book by pointing to its intellectual limits. Such a critique is made in reviews or by other authors in their own publications. A commercial publisher would probably not be delighted to have to sell a book in which the editors highlight what that book has failed to offer. Our book project, however, was regarded as a first step towards long-term co-operation between Georgian and Abkhaz academics in an international setting. We also had to see what kind of knowledge was lacking in the analysis of the conflict and in its proposed remedies. In the following, I will point out what I personally consider to be the main shortcomings of our common experience. According to the European scientific tradition, knowledge of such limits is a prerequisite for overcoming them.

The Lack of Institutional Models

One of the most striking aspects of the ongoing negotiations is that both sides are extremely precise in their wording when formulating mutual accusations, but rather vague when it comes to describing their own views on the functioning of common state institutions and, in particular, on security guarantees for the two communities. Unfortunately, the contributions to this volume have failed to overcome this limitation. The authors have tried to develop a positive approach to a compromise solution, but remain quite general on the subject of institutional arrangements. The Georgian contributions focus on the geopolitical conditions for a peace settlement and avoid the concretization of federal-type alternatives to the unitary state altogether. The Abkhaz proposals, in particular those of Stanislav Lakoba and Viacheslav Chirikba, are more helpful in this respect. In this book, the contrast between the readiness of the Abkhaz participants to take up the question of political status in practical terms and the relative reluctance of the Georgians to go beyond a general analysis of this question is quite interesting – especially if we are to parallel this contrast with the ongoing negotiation process. In recent years, the Abkhaz side has been criticized for not discussing the question of political status in a positive way. This criticism presupposed that a confederal arrangement that gives no guarantee to the Georgian side regarding the rights of the Georgian IDPs or the threat of secession could not be considered a concrete proposal. However, the fact that the Georgian political leadership has been declaring since 1995 that it is ready in principle to discuss more or less radical forms of federalization does not mean that this issue was prominent in intellectual debates in Georgia at the time the contributions to this book were being prepared – as is quite obvious in the contributions from the Georgian side.

Readers of this book will have the chance to familiarize themselves with Abkhaz perspectives on a common state. But in the institutional arrangements proposed they may have great difficulty in finding any clear delimitation of powers which would make lasting coexistence possible. None of the authors has tried to depict the consequences of a conflict of interests in the institutional framework they are proposing. It is difficult, in the proposals of Stanislav Lakoba or Viacheslav Chirikba, to see how a severe conflict of interests between the units of the federation or confederations could be solved without inevitably leading to a break-up of the proposed federative institutions and the re-establishment of *de facto* independence for the various units.

This failure to give practical consideration to the institutional reforms to be implemented is no doubt due to the participants' lack of particular expertise in this field. The conference and book

project were conceived as a first exchange of views on various aspects the conflict. The editors did not single out any one particular aspect of the conflict as being the most important. From this perspective, it should be explained that federalism and confederalism were not expected to constitute major topics of the contributions. The lack of analysis of institutional forms of ethnic conflict management, however, indicates a more difficult problem, as I have already stated above. The decision by the Georgian leadership – to strive for the reunification of Georgia with Abkhazia through federalization – was taken during the debates on a new constitution in 1995, and did not receive substantial intellectual support from the scientific community. Such a gap – between the insight of the leadership that federalization is the last resort for re-establishing political stability after the failure of all other options, on one hand, and the lack of federal expertise, on the other – should not be seen as an absolute barrier to federal reforms in Georgia. Every federation has its own unique experience in the process of federalization and has to produce its own expertise while actually undergoing this process. At first, constitutional and legal expertise will be called for. Other scientific disciplines (economics, finance, political science) will follow. In Spain and Belgium, a whole generation of experts were trained on the spot, during the debates on the implementation of federal institutions and in preparing constitutional drafts.

The interest in the mechanisms of federative systems is, however, further hindered by the fact that Georgians and Abkhazians attach greater importance to geopolitics than to state reforms. This was not the case in Spain and Belgium when discussions on federalization were taking place in those countries. This overriding interest in geopolitics can be explained by the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict itself. After the forcible incorporation of Georgia and Abkhazia into the Soviet Union in 1921, relations between the two communities became part of 'domestic' Soviet policies. During the struggle for sovereignty by the Georgians and Abkhazians at the end of the 1980s, and even after the break-up of the Soviet Union, it became extremely difficult to distinguish the 'international' dimension of the conflict from the 'domestic' power struggle taking place either in Moscow or in Tbilisi. The resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze as Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs in December 1990 was partly due to his differences with Gorbachev over the handling of the Tbilisi massacre in April 1989.[1] Shevardnadze also expressed his complaints about Gorbachev's passivity in the face of attacks on his foreign and defence policies from conservative military elements. Three years later, Shevardnadze (who had since become the leader of an independent Georgia), voiced a similar criticism of Yeltsin's unwillingness to halt the support of his (former Soviet and now Russian) troops to the Abkhaz side. The intermingling of domestic with international conflicts in Abkhazia, Georgia and Russia became even clearer after the retreat of Georgian forces from Abkhazia in October 1993. Shevardnadze was entirely dependent on Russian military support in order to crush the last attempt by former President Gamsakhurdia to regain power in Tbilisi. Russian support in the Georgian civil war was a trade-off for Georgia's entering the CIS and Russia's being allowed to station troops on Georgian territory. During the 1992-93 war, Abkhazia had benefited from the direct support of members of the Russian parliament. The Russian parliament and president may have shared similar views concerning the threat of secession in the Northern Caucasus and the need for a strong Russian presence in the Southern Caucasus, but they were involved in a severe conflict with each other on domestic policies. In October 1993, shortly after the Abkhaz military victory, Yeltsin ordered his troops to expel his adversaries by force from the parliament building in Moscow. With the arrest of vice-president Rutskoi and other opposition leaders in the parliament, Abkhazia lost significant leverage in Moscow.

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1 See Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl and Melvin A. Goodman, *The wars of Eduard Shevardnadze*, Hurst & Company, London, 1997, pp. 238-251.

If we were to describe the whole period 1989-1993 in more general terms, it would also be difficult to draw clear boundaries between domestic and international politics. This period included, simultaneously, the secession of Georgia from the Soviet Union, the breaking-up of the Soviet Union by Russia's secession, a fully fledged civil war in Georgia against a democratically elected president, the crushing of the parliamentary opposition in Russia with military support and the *de facto* secessions by Chechnya from Russia and by Abkhazia from Georgia. It is possible to analyse Georgian-Soviet, Russo-Soviet, Georgian-Russian, Chechen-Russian and Georgian-Abkhaz relations both as domestic and as international relations.

The fact that the events of the war did not make it possible to disentangle domestic from international politics largely explains why the present Russian, Georgian and Abkhazian political elites, which have all been part of the same Soviet elite, are unable to make a clear distinction between the external and internal dimensions of sovereignty or of the conditions for state stability. This is highly problematic when proposals for a settlement have to be formulated. When Eduard Shevardnadze argues in favour of applying the "Bosnian model" to Abkhazia, he is referring to the enforcement by the international community of Security Council resolutions, not to the domestic model of polyethnic coexistence implied in the Dayton agreement. His view of the Bosnian model is based on the recent experiences of the UN and NATO in the former Yugoslavia, and legitimizes the possible use of force. The use of this model serves domestic purposes by creating the hope that the international community may solve the conflict by enforcing some kind of order. It also aims to exert pressure on the Russian mediator in the conflict. In discussions in Western diplomatic circles – where a profound knowledge of Abkhazian problems can hardly be expected – it is particularly useful to speak in terms of a more familiar model in order to point out the need for resolute action.

The significance of the Bosnian model has not been well thought out. Shevardnadze's description of the exemplary character of intervention in Bosnia overlooks the huge difficulties of undoing ethnic cleansing there or securing the continued existence of the Bosnian state. The creation of new ethnic enclaves and state entities or the increasing take-over of direct responsibilities by representatives of international security institutions (in April 1998, for instance, the OSCE appointed its own administrator to govern Srebrenica)[2] is not reflected upon. The main criticism that may be levelled at Georgia's view of the "Bosnian model" is that it is not based on a clear view of how the "Georgian-Abkhaz model" of federal relations would prevent political instability and the outbreak of fresh violent conflicts. Nor does the propagandistic use of the Bosnian model take into account the political conditions for Western/international intervention that were present in Bosnia and are lacking in Abkhazia (Bosnia was not in Russia's back garden, whereas Abkhazia is considered to belong to Russia's sphere of influence; Western public opinion exerted tremendous pressure in favour of military intervention in Bosnia and the stationing of some 30,000 troops there, whereas it is not at all concerned about the conflict over Abkhazia).

According to the Georgian approach, the guarantees they would obtain through foreign support for the enforcement of any model of ethnic coexistence that respected the territorial integrity of Georgia are more important than the guarantees for stability that are inherent in the functioning of the model itself. The consequences of such an approach are well analysed in the contribution by Yuri Anchabadze when he describes the Georgian attitude to the Russo-Chechen war. Shevardnadze had supported the position of the Russian government (including its bombing of the civilian population of Grozny) and declared that he would grant Abkhazia the same powers as Russia granted Chechnya. After the military defeat of the Russian forces, Chechnya has been offered (and has refused) powers going far beyond what Georgia – which has to take into account

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2 *The Economist*, 11 April 1998.

the interests of its refugee population – is prepared to grant to Abkhazia. The main lesson to be learnt from this experience is that it is not only unrealistic but also counter-productive to hope that a co-ordination of Georgian policies with those of other regional powers or international institutions can be a substitute for well-thought-out blue-prints for a federal-type arrangement for Abkhazia. The Georgian leadership, in replacing its former reference to Chechnya by a new one to Bosnia, has apparently learnt the wrong lesson from this experience.

A lack of vision in thinking about the concrete form a common state could take is also characteristic of the Abkhaz leadership. The question of security and political guarantees for the Georgian population of Akbhazia does not appear to be well thought-out. The Abkhaz leadership is focusing its attention far more on the geopolitical factors that may influence their negotiating position than on blue-prints for state structures in which sovereignty would be shared. By refusing any direct discussion on the question of political status, or any dialogue with the political representatives of the Georgian population from Abkhazia, the Abkhaz leadership is expressing this thought in a no less radical form than the Georgians with their use of the "Bosnian model".

This lack of a creative vision of the domestic conditions for a peace settlement should not simply be explained away by a lack of political commitment or an inability to compromise. The criticism that has repeatedly been made of both parties by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – that the lack of progress in the negotiations is due to their inability to make substantial compromises – is quite acurate, but it does not go to the heart of the matter. Georgia and Abkhazia are in fact confronted by a security dilemma to which it seems initially that federative solutions may not necessarily produce a stable outcome. Georgia and Abkhazia have been going through a war which has brought both of them to the brink of total disintegration. Both are incapable of winning a new war without strong foreign support, while such a war would have disastrous effects on their economies and, even in the event of a military victory, would not necessarily achieve the objectives they are aiming at. The consequences of a compromise solution are, however, no easier to assess. There are indeed high risks involved for both sides in the creation of common state structures. A direct consequence of a confederal relationship with Akbhazia would be a radicalization of the positions of South Ossetia and Ajaria. The Georgian leadership has therefore flatly refused to consider it as an option in the negotiations. It is also extremely difficult for the Georgian government to calculate the repercussions of a federalization of its state structures on its relations with South Ossetia or Ajaria. Even very limited federalization creates its own dynamics, which – non-centralization being a basic characteristic of federalism – may not remain under the complete control of the present government. This is probably one of the reasons why no serious attempts have been made to develop any form of shared sovereignty with other regions or other ethnic communities in Georgia. The Abkhaz government has similar difficulty in predicting the political consequences of the return of refugees to Abkhazia and the creation of new state structures in which the present leadership would have to share power.

The primary normative function of any state is to protect its citizens. Up to now, neither the Georgian nor the Abkhaz state has fulfilled this function in the post-Soviet period. When its troops entered Abkhazia in August 1992, the Georgian state presented a threat to the Abkazian community. After the war, it enforced an economic embargo against a civilian population which it claimed to represent. The Abkhaz state was neither able nor willing to overcome the situation of ethnic cleansing by providing security guarantees for Georgian refugees returning to Abkhazia. Georgia and Abkhazia can only cease to represent a threat for each other if they are ready to take major risks in setting up a common state. It is far from certain whether the two

leaderships will be able, in the near future, to overcome their fear of destabilization. The intensification of economic and other forms of co-operation links, which has been taking place since November 1997, is a necessary but insufficient condition for creating the trust necessary for overcoming such fear and engaging in a risky form of political co-operation. The support of foreign governments to one side of the conflict or the other only exacerbates existing fears. Under these conditions, it would make sense not to raise false expectations among Georgian public opinion or to exacerbate the fears of the Abkhaz public by using the "Bosnian model", but instead to concentrate the political discussions on domestic conditions for stability in a process of political transformation. As both sides have to overcome similar fears, there is not much point in taking a stand for or against one party in the conflict.

The above position is a personal one. The other authors writing in this book would not necessarily share my views on the difficulties for the Georgian and Abkhaz leadership in going beyond the present stage in the negotiations. But some of the Georgian and Abkhaz contributions do point in the same direction. The fact that both sides rely far too heavily on foreign (Russian or Western) support to strengthen their own positions, for instance, is criticized by Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi. During the conference, it was also said that the lack of productive discussions on concrete state forms was partly due to a lack of knowledge among the public regarding (con)federal experiences. It was therefore decided that a second conference in Brussels should concentrate on assessing the significance of such experiences for Georgian-Abkhaz relations, and that the proceedings of this conference would be made accessible to a wide audience in Georgia and Abkhazia. The conference was held in November 1997 and the proceedings are at present being prepared for publication.

A Limited Dialogue

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict does not affect merely the Georgian and Abkhaz communities. The Russian, Armenian, Greek and other communities in Abkhazia have also been drawn into it. One of the major limitations of the present Georgian-Abkhaz collaboration – and apparently of many other diplomatic and NGO initiatives taken in the region – is their exclusive focus on the two communities which were directly opposed to each other during the war. The present Abkhaz government includes some non-Abkhaz ministers, but the non-Abkhaz communities do not participate as such in the negotiations. The non-Georgian population of Georgia is virtually not represented in the Georgian political establishment, and the questions of the future political status of South Ossetia and Ajaria are dealt with as separate negotiation issues by the Tbilisi government, in order to avoid any interference between one conflict and another.

The fact that it was impossible to include in this conference academics from among the Georgian refugee population in Abkhazia is most unfortunate. It can easily be explained by the fact that it would have been difficult to organize a dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz academics from Abkhazia in a situation where the Abkhaz government is refusing any form of dialogue with the political representatives of the refugee population. It could also be said that a conference which aims at initiating long-term co-operation first had to overcome strong mutual suspicion by Georgians from Georgia and Abkhazians from Abkhazia before widening the dialogue to include other participants. A dialogue between all communities from Abkhazia is a prerequisite for any peace settlement. The hurdles facing such a dialogue are in principle no greater than those overcome in Northern Ireland, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or between the South African apartheid regime and the ANC. There are probably also some areas of common interest between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities in Abkhazia, which are now obscured by mutual acts and

accusations of terrorism, but which may resurface once a dialogue is in place. For a time, the Georgian community in Abkhazia will remain dependent on the Tbilisi government in order to secure its political and property rights but, once these rights have been secured, it will find that as regards the economic future of the region it has more in common with the other communities in Abkhazia than with Georgia proper. This is especially true if we take a long-term perspective, as is necessary when speaking of national interests. This statement may be challenged – but it would surely be worthwhile to do so at an academic conference with the participation of all communities from Abkhazia.

Ghia Nodia

This volume is a mixture of an academic and a political exercise. Intellectuals do not usually like to be portrayed as representatives of nations or ethnic groups: in their capacity as intellectuals, they prefer to be regarded as staying aloof from communal allegiances. An academic conference where the participants are divided into two ethnically defined and equal "sides" plus "neutral" outsiders may be considered a contradiction in terms.

It is also true, however, that intellectuals play a conspicuous role in many conflicts like the one discussed in this book. In particular, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is sometimes viewed as one started by historians and philologists. It would be naive to believe that once scholars sort things out among themselves there will be no more room for fighting: academics are less important now than they used to be before the war (except for those who have become political leaders), and in general they are probably better at messing things up than sorting them out. But when politicians find themselves in a stalemate (as is the case in the conflict under consideration), it is only natural to expect intellectuals at least to make an attempt to explore alternative routes.

This volume may therefore be assessed from two viewpoints. First, it is an effort to describe and understand the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict from different perspectives. As such, it is to my knowledge the only one so far, and hence doomed to be the best. Readers may like or dislike the purely academic qualities of this or that paper, but the volume will probably become a must for those who want to understand the Abkhazian conflict. But as I said, there was also an important practical side: that of "exploring alternative routes". Here, assessments will probably be more mixed. Anyone who thought that solving the conflict needed only open-mindedness and honest intellectual effort will probably be disappointed. In the part devoted to future solutions, all participants were much more general and cautious than in describing the causes of and background to the conflict. The most specific proposal – that of Stanislav Lakoba to create a Georgian-Abkhaz-Chechen Confederation – can hardly be considered a ground for realistic discussion, as it would entail an open conflict between Georgia and Russia. There was no breakthrough, no brave new vision that intellectuals can bring home to brandish at their respective governments and societies.

But if the objective complexity of the situation is taken into account, then the results may be seen in a different light. For all the difficulties of the situation, which could make a person quite pessimistic about the prospects for its resolution (and I believe the articles in this volume show this complexity quite well), the participants did agree on an important issue – that a viable final solution has to be sought along the lines of federalism. In this, I share the general optimism expressed at the end of Chirikba's article. To be sure, this optimism should not be exaggerated either: words like "federation" or "confederation" have been routinely used by representatives of the parties to the conflict as symbols rather than concepts, and Bruno Coppieters is absolutely

right in saying that serious public discussion on their substance is lacking in both Georgian and Abkhaz societies. This was obvious during the conference as well. But that is exactly the point: the substance of specific options needs to be explored and discussed, and who are supposed to be the first do this, if not academics? An understanding of the necessity to go into the details of federal projects was probably the major outcome of the conference – and provided an idea for another project. On behalf of the Georgian participants, I can say that we came away from the conference a little bit more optimistic than when we arrived at it.

Events on the ground since the conference was held have fuelled the arguments of both optimists and pessimists. On the one hand, in August 1997 in Tbilisi there was a meeting between Ardzinba and Shevardnadze which caused a sensation, but did not bring too many tangible results. It was important, though, that the sides agreed not to use military means (however little agreements like this tend to be honoured in the Caucasus), and that the meeting was followed by a number of visits which explored the possibility of economic co-operation – a whole new development which had not taken place before. On the other hand, guerrilla fighting intensified in the southern part of Abkhazia, and May 1998 saw a major outbreak of violence which raised fears of a new, fully-fledged war. The Georgian government dissociates itself from Georgian armed groups and may even ostensibly condemn their actions, but it is also an open secret that it does provide help to at least some of the guerrilla groups. Most importantly, the guerrilla movement is legitimate in the eyes of the Georgian public, which has been disappointed by years of fruitless negotiations, and there is pressure on the government to support the guerrilla movement openly (as the exiled government of Abkhazia does). This does not mean that there is public support for a large-scale new war, but it is assumed that the Sukhumi government should get a clear message that it cannot simply get away with ethnic cleansing. This is obviously a dangerous development – bitterness caused by new deaths may reduce the willingness to compromise even more, and guerrilla groups may eventually become a destabilizing force in Georgia proper.

This leads one to think that, even though we wish otherwise, the final settlement in Abkhazia is probably a long-term project and should be treated as such. As a result, meetings like the one which gave birth to this book are even more important. The unwillingness of bad politicians or the vested interests of particular groups are not the major obstacle to lasting peace. Illusions about oneself and others, lack of information, being unaccustomed to facing difficult problems and tough choices are much more important – and take more time to overcome. In that sense, any joint attempt to explore honestly the problems and choices that are there, besides having an academic value, has significance as a step towards peace.

Yuri Anchabadze

The conference "Georgians and Abkhazians: The Search for a Settlement and the Role of the International Community" has become an appreciable landmark in the nascent scientific dialogue between Georgian and Abkhazian researchers on the problems associated with the war of 1992-1993 and its consequences – extremely painful and serious for both parties – and on the search for ways to resolve this conflict. The need for such a dialogue had already been felt for a long time. Meanwhile, previous sporadic attempts to establish contact had ended in failure, since the diametrically opposed positions of the participants, based on their emotional and personalized perceptions of recent tragic events, have become a serious obstacle to constructive academic dialogue and discussion.

The conference, held in June 1997 in Brussels at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, has become a testimony to the new situation that has been evolving. An intensive three days of work has shown that the period of emotional attacks and sweeping accusations, to which both parties were so frequently prone in the recent past, is already behind them. The particular political circumstances on which the position of many authors writing about the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict was based has lost relevance. Nowadays, scientists both in Tbilisi and in Sukhum are trying to comprehend objectively the origins of and reasons for the tragic opposition between Georgia and Abkhazia, and to present their own vision offering possible ways out of the situation as it stands.

The presentations made at the conference and the discussions that followed them have shown that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is being divested of its burden of mythological notions, which have until recently been an integral part of political science treatises and publications on this topic. In any case, legends about the Christian-Islamic underpinnings of Georgian-Abkhazian antagonism, about the "genetic" Abkhaz adherence to Communist ideology and the Soviets, about 300,000 Georgian refugees expecting repatriation, etc., were not at issue at the conference. Attention focused instead on the real situation in the region, on the complex problems that actually had engendered the conflict or become a consequence of it, and that now represent a fundamental obstacle to achieving a peace settlement.

At the same time, it is clear that the parties do not always adequately understand the specific features of the political, social and ideological processes taking place in the opposite "camp". Thus our Georgian colleagues obviously do not take into account the impact of the post-war syndrome on people of all walks of life in Abkhazia and, in particular, on the moral attitude and psychological state of the population of the republic when it comes to possible contacts and forms of mutual relations with Georgia and the Georgians. An inaccurate negative estimation of Russia's role in the genesis of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict, in the events of the war and at the present stage of peace settlement, was also expressed. On the other hand, the critical interpretation by the Georgian participants of the position and actions of the Tbilisi leadership, which had aggravated a deterioration in Georgian-Abkhazian relationships and contributed to the unleashing of hostilities in August 1992, was in many respects unexpected by the Abkhazian representatives. Such appraisals were perceived by the Abkhazian side as a new phenomenon among both scientists and the general public in Georgia.

Nevertheless, discussions were quite heated. As was to be expected, the basic scientific problem posed at the conference proved to be a source of considerable debate. A consensus on the issues raised in the search for agreement between the parties has not yet been found. The divergence between the positions of the conference participants is far greater and deeper than the areas where convergence was reached. In the process, the specific approaches to this question adopted by the Georgian and Abkhazian conference participants have come to light.

The position of the Georgian scholars is that agreement should be sought in the context of the territorial integrity of the former Georgian SSR. Among the arguments cited are not only the fact that Georgia has been internationally recognized as an independent state in its Soviet borders – although for the Georgian participants this is obviously the most essential circumstance – but also reasons of a geopolitical, economic and historical nature, adduced to support the unification of Georgia and Abkhazia within the framework of a single state. In its polity, this state would replicate a certain variation on the model of relationships between Tbilisi and Sukhum from the period of the Soviet regime.

The Abkhazian participants preferred to examine other settlement models. In their opinion, overcoming the deep-seated mistrust which the parties now feel towards each other would be an important step in the direction of concord. This should be promoted by the institution of new,

non-traditional forms of relationships (for Stanislav Lakoba for example, a Caucasian confederation), within the framework of which the Abkhazian representatives are inclined to envisage the future peace settlement of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict.

At the conference, the question of the role of the international community in achieving an Abkhazian-Georgian agreement was raised. The conference has shown that in this case, too, the positions of the parties do not wholly coincide. The Georgian participants had a rather high estimation of the peace-making potential of the world community, and considered that Russia's unsuccessful mediation could be replaced, or at least complemented, by more active participation by Western countries in the process of political settlement. The statements by the Abkhaz representatives were not so optimistic. In their opinion, a more active role by the West might endanger the existing geopolitical balance in the region, an occurence that would not be conducive to the positive development of the peace-making process.

At the same time, the conference papers have shown complete unanimity on the question of the need to attract Western theoretical thinking to address scientifically the complex problems associated with the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, and, on a broader scale, the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia from both a historical and a modern perspective. Research should also concentrate on analysing the European experience of federalization and community-building, the particular features of the development of local regionalism, and the positive and negative aspects to the history of constructing the common European home. From this point of view, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the presentations contributed by the European participants and the discussions they sparked off. It is also extremely important that a study of the moral aspects of the situation – focusing, in particular, on the war and its consequences – was entered on the list of problems to do with the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict that were discussed at the conference.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the publication of the conference proceedings will not only serve the purposes of research on the various problems of Abkhazian-Georgian relations, but will also become an important step on the way towards mutual understanding between the scientific communities of Georgia and Abkhazia, whose joint efforts can help in the search for peace and concord in the region.

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